Narahari Kaviraj

A PEASANT UPRISING IN BENGAL 1783

THE FIRST FORMIDABLE PEASANT RISING AGAINST THE RULE OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

PEOPLE'S PUBLISHING HOUSE

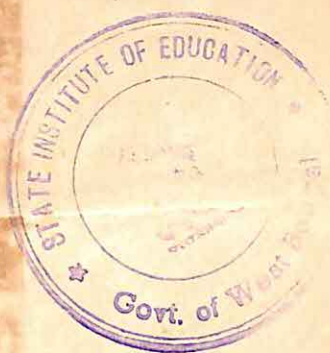
This book unfolds the story of the first formidable peasant rising against the rule of the English East India Company.

Numerous peasant risings broke out in Bengal against the tyranny and misgovernment of the company's rule, but unfortunately very little has been written on them. In this respect, the present book breaks new ground. It is all the more significant as it is an exhaustive study of a single peasant rising the like of which, as far as we know, has hardly been attempted by any scholar in Bengal.

It brings to light the volume of discontent among the peasants and also the inspiring story of militant struggles which they waged against the alien government and its Indian servitors.

The book is the result of painstaking research on the hitherto unpublished source-material preserved in the Record Room of the government of West Bengal.

This authentic history will be of invaluable help to those who want to know modern Indian history in its depth, particularly to those who are interested to understand the role of the masses who are really the makers of history.

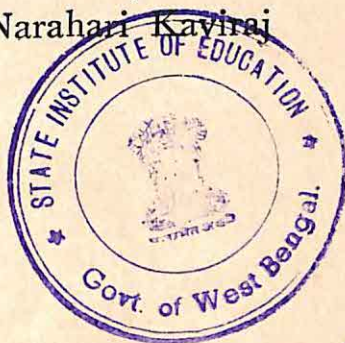
Rs. 12.50

A PEASANT UPRISING IN BENGAL

A PEASANT UPRISING IN BENGAL

1783

The First Formidable Peasant Uprising against the Rule of East India Company

By

Narahari Kaviraj

PEOPLE'S PUBLISHING HOUSE
New Delhi Ahmedabad Bombay

Dedicated

to those peasant heroes of Bangladesh, who, true to the tradition of their forefathers, have laid down their lives in the national liberation struggle of Bangladesh.

Preface

Peasant risings in Bengal are no doubt an interesting subject for study. All the more so because it forms a missing link in the history of Bengal.

It is a fact that the peasant risings have not received from our historians the importance they deserve. But it is at the same time a difficult subject to deal with. The greatest difficulty being that there is hardly any record that gives the version of the rebels. The only course left is to reconstruct the history of the risings from the official records—volumes of which have been preserved in the archives of the West Bengal government. The author has tried to utilise the relevant records available on the subject.

The book is an attempt to combine academic research (not in the narrow sense) with Marxist analysis. How far the author has been successful is, however, a different matter.

The book would not have taken its present shape had not its author received the ungrudging assistance from a number of his friends and colleagues.

Shri Sailesh Sengupta has placed me in a deep debt of gratitude by going through the manuscript and suggesting some improvements in the text, most of which I was only glad to accept.

Prof N. Bagchi and Prof Dipika Bose, both of them my colleagues, have helped me in various ways. In fact, they have a share in the moulding of my thoughts.

31 December 1971 NARAHARI KAVIRAJ

Introduction

The first twenty years of the rule of the English East India Company were marked by a long series of revenue farming experiments.

Revenue farming has always been a handy weapon for oppressive governments. In France the Bourbons adopted it as their last resort and the oppression was so universal that it goaded the peasants to rebellion. Similar experiments of the East India Company also became so oppressive that they caused widespread unrest among the peasants of Bengal which sometimes found expression in formidable peasant uprisings.

Origins of Farming System under Mughal Rule

Farming system was not, however, unknown to Bengal. It reared its head during the last few years of Mughal rule. The growing influence of the revenue farmers, contractors and speculators was typical of the period of Mughal decline. It is generally held that at its inception the Mughal system of land revenue was based on the principle of moderation. The original assessment in Bengal was imposed according to an actual survey and valuation made in the time of Akbar (1556-1605). The entire land was then valued and the rent of each inhabitant and each village was ascertained.[1] The aswil jumma, or the original assessment, was permanent because it was moderate. This was the rule of collection till the fall of the Mughal gov-

[1] *The Report of the Amini Commission*—Proceedings of Revenue *Department, 3 April 1778.*

PU-1

ernment. The government was satisfied with a moderate quit-rent from the country. Every additional tax on land was contrary to the standing law of the empire which was held sacred and inviolable.[2]

It appears, however, as the power of the Mughal government declined, there were deviations from the general practice. Murshid Quli Khan (1701-25) first broke through this regular system by imposing new assessments on the country, which were accompanied with acts of personal violence. Alivardi Khan (1740-56) further added to the burden of taxation,[3] however every district paid its proportion of the demand.[4]

During the time of Mir Qasim (1760-63) the situation deteriorated still further. He planned and in part executed a general hustabood, or valuation of the provinces, for the purpose of collecting whatever was paid by the raiyats. Such an innovation undoubtedly led to gross acts of personal violence of which the victims were not only the raiyats but also the zamindars and other intermediaries. The principles on which Mir Qasim acted conformed to the peculiar situation in which he was placed. He knew that his tenure of government was precarious, and he was determined to make the most of an uncertain temporary possession.[5]

Typical of this period of decline were the arrogation of certain powers by the zamindars and the deterioration in the position of the raiyats.

Originally the zamindars were revenue collectors or revenue managers who had to act under the strict rules of a well-regulated government and in close cooperation with other revenue officers (e.g. the kanungos) appointed by the state. The accounts of the rents of every portion of land and other sources of revenue were open to inspection by the officers of

---

[2] *Minutes of Philip Francis*—Proceedings of Revenue Department, 21 February 1777. In his minutes Francis also quotes from Mr Scrafton who asserts that till the time of the invasion of Nadir Shah there was scarcely a better administered government in the world.

[3] *Amini Report*, op. cit.

[4] *Minutes of P. Francis*, op. cit.

[5] Ibid.

the government. It was chiefly by the intimate knowledge of matters relating to revenue and the summary means of information which the government thereby possessed, that revenue was collected and the zamindars restrained from resorting to oppressions and exactions.[6]

Gradually, however, as the authority of a settled government became loose, as the authority of the local revenue officers also dwindled, as the knowledge of the government about the state and resources of the country became extremely limited, as the ancient revenue institutions fell into disuse, certain evils and abuses crept into the revenue administration and revenue management of the country.

It was during this period that the zamindars arrogated to themselves certain powers which they did not possess before. Originally they were the agents of the government. But as time passed by, "these agents were less and less controlled, and they soon became mere contractors for fixed total sums; and the local officers had no power whatever over them, and finally disappeared before them".[7] The system of this type of revenue farming was specially developed in Bengal. Not long after the year 1727, the system had already taken root and could never afterwards be got rid of, overrunning everything else.

Alongside the change in the position of the zamindar there was a corresponding change in the position of the raiyat also. The Amini Commission observed:

"When the ancient mode of assessment on an actual valuation fell into disuse, and the sum demanded by the government from the zamindars as their respective quota of revenue came to be fixed, not from a knowledge of the capacity of the several districts formed on regular and authentic accounts but merely by a conjectural estimate, this innovation on the part of the government authorised the like practice in the zamindars, and every additional sum exacted from them was levied by accumulated taxes on their vassals and ryots. When a part of the ryots

---

[6] *Amini Report*, op. cit.

[7] Baden Powell: *The Land Systems of British India*, Vol. I, pp. 184-88.

could no longer submit to such exorbitant demands, they were forced to shun persecution by deserting their lands and habitations. The revenues of the zamindars being thus diminished, the rents of the remaining ryots were proportionately increased; and new demands occasioned new desertions. These circumstances mutually operated as causes on each other and largely contributed to the impoverished state of some of the districts of Bengal."[8]

Thus during the declining years of Mughal rule the zamindars became less and less the agents of the government and more and more farmers of revenue. Even then the zamindars were an age-old institution and they were without exception the residents of the districts under their charge. But the farming system which the East India Company introduced into Bengal was completely of a different kind.

First Farming Experiments under the East India Company

By the treaty concluded immediately after the battle of Plassey (1757), the 24 Parganas became "the company's zamindary". For the first 16 months after coming into possession, the company's government kept the collections of revenue in their own hands. In May 1759, however, they decided to let out the revenues to farm. The proposal to put the lands up to public auction in single parganas and letting them to the highest bidder was first mooted by Holwell. The most distinctive feature of the new arrangement was that the new farmers were appointed from among the company's officers and servants. English officers of the company also became farmers. Holwell himself became one.

The new experiment brought about disastrous effects. It gave a legal sanction to all sorts of speculation. It most adversely affected the interests of the raiyats. It was considered by the

[8] *Amini Report*, op. cit.

natives "an act of oppression".[9] Firminger did not fail to notice the harmful effects of the new experiment. He remarked:

"Whatever abstract arguments might be advanced in favour of the new experiment, in practice it was found that the bids for revenue farms made at public auctions were, as a rule, of a wildly speculative character."

Pointing out that under the new arrangement rack-renting of the cultivators became a general feature, he observed that the system was all the more objectionable because "the revenue farmer was seldom of the soil race, but a mere stranger in the districts, there were no ties of local interests to link him with the ryots."[10]

On 27 September 1760, by a treaty with Mir Qasim the three districts of Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagong which yielded about ⅓ of the entire revenue of Bengal were assigned to the company.

Coming under the possession of the East India Company these three districts like the district of 24 Parganas became the scenes of different experiments all of which ended in greater and still greater oppression of the people.

In December 1760, the council at Fort William appointed Harry Verelst to be the chief of Chittagong and Gokul Ghosal dewan. Verelst's revenue dealings were "direct". The council at Calcutta took note of the fact that during the Mughal rule, under a succession of governors, large increases had been levied on the districts. Taking this as a plea it wrote to the chief: "As Chittagong rents have been continually raised, raise them higher".[11]

In 1764 Anselm Beaumont, a wealthy free merchant of Calcutta, who had been rewarded with a post in the company's service as an acknowledgment of his services on the occasion

---

[9] Verelst: *View of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the English Government in Bengal* (1772), Appendix, p. 137.

[10] Firminger: *Historical Introduction to the Bengal Portion of the Fifth Report*, pp. 117-18.

[11] Ibid., p. 133.

of the siege in 1756, was appointed the resident at Midnapore. Beaumont pleaded that the granting of leases for a term of years was the only method to encourage cultivation of waste land. Governor Vansittart and his council issued instructions "entirely annulling the authority of zamindars" and "appointed officers everywhere on the part of the company to collect the rents immediately from the ryots".[12] But the two residents who succeeded Beaumont in turn disapproved of the plan and they wrote to the Calcutta council: "As to your proposition of letting the lands upon more advantageous leases than have hitherto been granted, it must proceed from your not being sufficiently advised of the constitution of this province." In the teeth of such strong opposition from the local chiefs the Calcutta authorities stopped short of implementing their farming plan.

John Johnstone was sent to Burdwan to make a new settlement. Under his administration the system of putting up the revenue collections to farm at a public auction was introduced. Johnstone himself, Hay and Bolts had in their possession the most profitable farms. The more substantial farmers being ruined and squeezed out, the mutsuddis in the employ of the company's administration took advantage of the situation and selected out for themselves the most profitable farms. "I found", wrote Verelst, "the most considerable part of the land was farmed by the mutsuddis, and those the most principal selected out by them."[13]

Corruption among the English officers of the East India Company had reached such a height that the Court of Directors had to intervene. They wrote: "We have on a former occasion in our letter... permitted our servants to bid at the public sale of the Calcutta lands but we could not conceive such an indulgence could ever be construed to admit servants employed in the collection of the revenue of a province to select out the most profitable lands for themselves and it is one more striking proof of the general corruption."[14] Verelst who was sent to

---

[12] Ibid., pp. 136-37.

[13] Ibid., pp. 150-55.

[14] Quoted by N. K. Sinha in *The Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 30.

Burdwan to set matters right wrote to the Court of Directors: "The greatest part of the province fell into the hands of a set of rapacious wretches, who revelled in the produce of the lands. . .the ryots, who had been oppressed by the head farmers and many ruined, were obliged to desert their lands, which became uncultivated."[15]

In a recent work it has been rightly stated: "In practice this farming system was disastrous to the country. Speculative farming was an innovation. Distrust of old established farmers made farms the happy hunting ground of mutsuddis and banians. Venality's progress was very rapid during these years because the principle of government was itself an abuse. Johnstone has been described as 'avarice personified'. Holwell, Hay and Bolts were no better. Their agents were well-chosen. Fraud and villainy were carried to the greatest extent."[16]

The Amildari System

In 1765 a new chapter in the land revenue history of Bengal was added when the English acquired the rights of dewani. Firminger writes: "Having accepted the Diwani, or general control of the revenue collections, the English deliberately adopted a policy of festina lente. They felt that in the ceded lands, they had already benefited by an experience which in the course of time they might apply to the lands of the Diwani portion, but for the present they resolved to avail themselves of the services of a Naib Diwan, and to collect their revenues by means of the indigenous machinery of the aumils, tehsildars, etc. etc."[17] The choice for the post of naib diwan fell on Md Reza Khan who appeared not in the character of a representative of the nawab's government but as a company's salaried servant.

Md Reza Khan who knew that his prosperity depended upon his services to the company left no stone unturned to satisfy

---

[15] Firminger, op. cit., p. 153.
[16] N. K. Sinha, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 27-28.
[17] Firminger, op. cit., p. 175.

the greed of his masters. He raised the revenue demand as much as he could.

The amildari system which Md Reza Khan introduced was in its essentials another form of revenue farming. The local zamindars who were unable to meet such high revenue demands were quietly set aside and amils were given the chance to take their places.[18] On their appointment they agreed to pay a fixed sum for the districts that were assigned to their charge and the man that offered the highest was generally preferred. Under the amils demand was added to demand. A band of unworthy men, under the cover of the company's authority, they plundered the raiyats of all their effects and brought the country to the verge of ruin.

Oppression became so obvious and so general that even the highest of the company's officers could not but make significant admissions. Harry Verelst who became the governor of Bengal in January 1767 admitted that in the period following the acquisition of dewani "there had been oppressions and intrigues unknown at any other period".[19] Richard Becher, the resident at the Durbar, made a candid admission of the oppressions and observed: "When the English first received the grant of the Dewanee their first consideration seems to have been the raising of as large sums from the country as could be collected...the zamindars not being willing or able to pay the sums required, amils were sent into most of the districts. These amils on their appointment agree with the ministers to pay a fixed sum for the districts they are to go to and the man that has offered most has generally been preferred. What a destructive system is this for the poor inhabitants."[20]

Universal distress in the province could only be the result of such a "destructive system". The raiyats were sucked dry. Lands were left uncultivated. Plains were turned into jungle.

To add fuel to fire, the year 1770 was preceded by a year of very unusual scarcity of rain. As a cumulative effect of a long

---

[18] Ibid., pp. 183-84.
[19] Ibid., p. 176.
[20] Ibid., p. 184.

series of wreckless revenue experiments coupled with scarcity of rain, Bengal was visited with a terrible famine in 1770 which took the lives of at least one-third of the inhabitants of the province. The famine provided the company's servants, both European and Indian, with a hunting ground for their profiteering expeditions. Md Reza Khan complained of monopoly trading of rice being carried on by the Europeans and their gomosthas. Others sent information to the directors that when famine was at its height Md Reza Khan himself had been guilty of great oppressions.[21]

Side by side with this profiteering in grain there proceeded during the famine the unending extortion of revenue from the starving peasants. Warren Hastings himself pointed out in 1772, "Notwithstanding the loss at least one-third of the inhabitants of the province and the consequent decrease of the cultivation, the nett collections of the year 1771 exceeded even those of 1768" (a year of plenty).

These facts conclusively prove that in spite of the charges and countercharges that they levelled against one another the company's directors, Md Reza Khan, the European officers and their gomosthas were all links in the same chain—a chain of oppression that sustained the administration of the East India Company.

The famine of 1770 forced the directors of the East India Company to realise that the amildari system must be scrapped simply because it was unworkable. For the oppressions associated with this system and for the losses caused by the famine, all the blame was put on the shoulders of Md Reza Khan. He was singled out, made responsible for all the crimes and dismissed from service.

In August 1771, the East India Company at last decided to "stand forth as the Dewan". This decision was plainly enough taken with a view to undoing the state of things then prevailing in the province. But whatever the declared objective of the decision, in practice it resulted in the continuation of the old state of things.

---

[21] Ibid., p. 204.

The Five Year Settlement (1772-77)

In April 1771, when the Bengali year was drawing to a close, the controlling committee of revenue directed its attention to the conclusion of the new year's settlement. The naib diwan who was taken into consultation advised the committee that their desire of continuing the bandobast of the last year was not practicable. In his opinion it could not be effected but by stratagem. The difficulties of continuing the old bandobast arose out of the famine and the destruction that it had caused in the country. Many places, he observed, bore the appearance of ruin and desolation. The naib diwan warned the committee that if they decided to make a tour of the districts in order to put the new year's settlement into effect, they must be prepared to meet the raiyats from all parts and of all castes, who would flock to them to represent their misery and grievances and of which they would have ample demonstration.[22]

An equally harrowing tale was reported to the committee by Charles Stuart, the resident at Burdwan. He wrote, "From the late severe drought, famine and desertion of the raiyats, all the farms to the northern and eastern quarters of the district are greatly in decay and the farmers have suffered so considerably, that if put up at sale, a great decrease of revenue is to be apprehended."[23]

These distressing reports, however, failed to influence in any way the policy of the committee. The farming system, which had already been tried in 24 Parganas and Burdwan and which had produced such disastrous consequences, was now made generally applicable to all the districts of Bengal. Warren Hastings wrote: "I found the farming system already established throughout the country. All the orders of the company, all without exception enjoined it. I made it general and

[22] Extracts from *Murshidabad Consultations*—Controlling Committee of Revenue, 1 April 1771.

[23] *Letter from Charles Stuart*, Proceedings of Controlling Committee of Revenue, 1 April 1771.

received their commendation. I lengthened the period of the leases which before was annual to five years. This was considered by many as a bold innovation."[24] The farming system appeared to the committee the best calculated to "promote the flourishing state of the country".[25]

In the name of promoting the flourishing state of the country, it was carefully calculated to promote the selfish interests of the East India Company.

Under the new farming system rack-renting became a general feature. Maximisation of revenue and employment of terror as a means to enforce it became the order of the day. Never before was oppression so universal as now.

A districtwise survey will make this abundantly clear.

Nadia: It was here that the plan of the five-year settlement was first carried into practice. It was decided to hold a public auction and a public advertisement was made to attract the highest bidder. The allurement of profit spurred many adventurers to try to outbid one another. This was, however, a district that was least suited to feed such vain hopes. For, besides its having suffered in an extreme degree from the dreadful effects of the last famine, the soil was very unfertile and the raiyats for the same reason were so very indigent that it was with difficulty that they were able to subsist upon their labour. In such conditions, the farmers who rack-rented the district found their expectations so little answered that most of them were reduced to a sate of insolvency. The failure of the farmers becoming an undisputed fact, a settlement was made with the zamindar and a remission granted of 30,000 rupees. It soon appeared that the remission was not adequate and it was recommended that a still further deduction of at least double that amount was necessary.[26]

Birbhum: Birbhum was one of the worst affected districts during the famine of 1770. In many places the famine carried away more than one-third of the total population, and in

[24] Quoted by N. K. Sinha, op. cit., p. 71.
[25] Proceedings of Controlling Committee of Revenue, 23 April 1771.
[26] Proceedings of Revenue Department, 7 April 1775.

some places, a much larger number. Such was the rate of destruction of human lives that in 1176 (B.S.) large tracts of bajeapto, baze zamin and chakran lands were taken over by government from 2,226 poor and indigent people. Many of them died during the famine and the greatest part of the lands, for want of raiyats to cultivate them, had become entirely barren.[27]

Numerous representations were received from famine-stricken raiyats and some from the local renters including one from the Raja of Birbhum. All of them prayed for a reduction of rent but their prayers were unceremoniously turned down. The district was farmed to a group of unscrupulous persons—mostly outsiders and some of them Calcutta banians. Bishnupur and Pachet were farmed by Kantoo Babu, a banian in the employ of the Governor-General himself. The revenue on Pachet was doubled upon what was credited the year before.[28]

The underfarmers and the local officers were in the habit of collecting more than what was allowed in the rent-roll. The supervisor of Birbhum stated that raiyats in large numbers applied to him, complaining of the hardships they had suffered from extraordinary fines and taxes which were forcibly levied upon them. But as the complaints remained unattended there was mass desertion of raiyats.[29]

Emphasising the effects of mass desertion, Alexander Higginson, on behalf of the provincial council at Burdwan, wrote: "I am sorry to be under the necessity of acquainting you that there are complaints from all parts... of a very considerable desertion of raiyats... The above desertions not only resulted in an immediate loss of rents from those who had left the province, but also caused numerous applications to pour in from the remaining raiyats who had been charged with palataki or a tax imposed on the raiyats that remained for loss caused by the raiyats that deserted. As the local offiers admit, the arbitrary mode of collecting the rents and taxing the raiyats des-

---

[27] Proceedings of Revenue Board of the Whole Council, 7 June 1774.
[28] Proceedings of Revenue Department, 24 November 1775.
[29] Proceedings of Controlling Committee of Revenue, 30 May 1771.

troyed all order and regularity. The system was so destructive that it ruined the farmers themselves. Many of the farmers, underfarmers and kutkinadars were thrown into confinement for the large balances due from them."[30]

Burdwan: All the farms in the district had become khas. But the rate of revenue was as high as in the other districts during the three years 1769, 1770 and 1771. In addition there were the effects of the famine. Owing to the severe drought, famine and mass desertion of raiyats, all the farms to the northern and eastern parts of the district fell into decay. The resident at Burdwan proposed that while the northern and eastern quarters might be allowed some deduction, an increase should be charged on the southern and western parts (which had suffered less by famine) so that the total income from the Burdwan district could be maintained at the old level.[31]

Hooghly: It felt the effects of the famine more severely. Nevertheless at the time of the five-year settlement the revenue demand was increased considerably.

Salt Districts: Hijli, Mahisadal and Tamluk were commonly styled the salt districts. In the year of famine, in these districts there was considerable loss of human lives. But even admitting that the effects of the famine on these districts were a bit less severe than on the northern districts, the revenue charged was much greater than what was realised from them the year preceding the famine.[32]

24 Parganas: As in other districts a high rate of revenue was fixed on the farmers. But the raiyats in this district entered into a league; they refused to pay at such a high rate; and the farmers were completely ruined.[33]

Jessore: This district was in a distressing condition. As a result of the famine, there was a great loss of human lives; cultivation was at a standstill. Yet the district was farmed at a high rate. Why its terms were settled at so enhanced a rate

---

30 Proceedings of Revenue Department, 11 July 1775.

31 Proceedings of Controlling Committee of Revenue, 1 April 1771.

32 Proceedings of Revenue Department, 7 April 1775.

33 Ibid., 9 March 1775.

would be explained only if one took note of the manner in which competition took place between other bidders and the zamindar at the time of letting the lands. The zamindar was entirely ruined.[34]

Mahomedsahy: It suffered equally from the effects of the famine and was consequently in a state of decay. Yet the terms of the settlement were very rigorous. They exceeded the ability of the district. The inevitable consequence was extortion and oppression of the raiyats. The zamindar tried to prevent the raiyats from complaining to the local authorities by threatening them with the severest punishment. Moreover, when the inhabitants of four villages left their habitations to lay their complaints before the local chiefs, the zamindar forcibly prevented their having access to the cutchery.[35]

Rajshahi: In a report submitted by Messrs Middleton, Dacres, Lane and Hurst who had lately visited the district, it is stated that it was too melancholy a truth that the whole country suffered a dreadful depopulation at the time of the famine. As a consequence, a smaller portion of the land was cultivated and the manufactures terribly suffered.[36] Such was the condition of the district when the committee of circuit imposed upon it the rigorous terms of the new five-year settlement.

The settlement was made with the Rani of Rajshahi, who offered the highest terms outbidding other intending farmers. Family pride and dread of loss of character and fame induced the rani to engage with the government beyond what her country could afford to pay. As a result she failed to satisfy the high demand of the government and soon incurred its displeasure. In the following year the district was given in farm to one Dulal Roy superseding the authority of the rani. After he took over, the situation drifted from bad to worse. In a mass petition the raiyats of Rajshahi complained to the board that the rents had been doubled and there had been an extraordinary increase in the number of mathots. Moreover, they com-

[34] Ibid., 7 April 1775.

[35] Proceedings of Revenue Board of the Whole Council, 23 April 1773.

[36] Proceedings of Revenue Department, 7 April 1775.

plained, Dulal Roy had invented several new and tyrannical modes of taxation.[37]

The situation became all the more loathsome because, a third of the whole population having perished in the famine, the remaining two-thirds were now obliged to pay for the lands now left without cultivation. The inevitable effect of such wholesale oppression was mass desertion and further depopulation. The entire district wore a look of desolation and ruin.

Purnea: The district of Purnea was farmed in 1177 (B.S.) to Huzurimull and Madan Dutt, two Calcutta moneyocrats, for a period of five years. But the new farmers who made the highest bid had no real knowledge about the deplorable condition of the district. They did not know that there had been an annual decrease of revenue since 1175 (B.S.) and that during these years the district had suffered greatly by a migration of its population.

The farmers' agents who were sent to Purnea and were not acquainted with the actual situation within the district were assigned the impossible task of realising revenue much more than the country could bear. They, therefore, adopted the most tyrannical modes of extortion and became a terror to the inhabitants of the district.

But the raiyats of Purnea could not be overawed. They became desperate and everywhere threatened the collectors that unless the jummabandi was settled according to their satisfaction, they would leave the country. Actually, a large party of raiyats had already started leaving the country when they were with great difficulty persuaded to return by the persons deputed by the district officer.[38]

About the conduct of the raiyats, the district officer observed that one compelling factor was that the raiyats having little substantial property could easily change their habitation. So there was the custom which prevailed among the raiyats of migrating from one village to another to obtain a remission of rent. More-

---

[37] Ibid., 1 March 1775.

[38] Proceedings of Committee of Circuit, 16 December 1772.

over, the raiyats showed marvellous power of combination. They knew how to unite and how to wring unwilling concessions from the farmers and the government. At the time of jummabandi the raiyats insisted on abatements, particularly they would not agree to a mathot and would require the terms of their patta to be rigidly complied with. The district officer writes: "It is the custom of the raiyats of Purnea to take out pattas every year, and at those times they refuse to enter upon cultivation till they have brought the farmer or government to their own terms. On these occasions the whole raiyats of a pargana often rise in a body and come to the cutchery of the district, where the government is obliged to interfere to compromise the matter between them and the farmer."[39]

In these conditions, the district officer observed that he did not think that the revenue that had been fixed for it had any chance of being realised. Placed in this predicament, the farmers Huzurimull and Madan Dutt failed to fulfil their engagements. They were at their wit's end and finally appealed to the government to be allowed to relinquish their farm.

Dinajpur: The district was completely in ruins when the five-year settlement was introduced. From official reports it is clear that large collections had been made for several successive years preceding the famine of 1770. Moreover, the effect of the famine had been most severely felt in this part of the country. Refusing to take note of this state of affairs, the government foisted upon it a five-year settlement the terms of which were beyond the power of the district to bear.[40]

The farmers spared no pains to realise the revenue according to the terms of their engagement. But they soon discovered that the demand was put so high that it could not be realised. They found to their dismay that the underfarmers and kutkinadars were all refusing to cooperate with them. Many of them handed in their resignation during the second year of their lease because of the loss they had sustained in the foregoing year.[41]

---

[39] Proceedings of Revenue Department, 18 July 1775.
[40] Proceedings of Revenue Board of the Whole Council, 29 June 1773.
[41] Ibid., 14 June 1774.

The government, however, was unrelenting in its demands. The district officer used every means in his power to compel the farmers to discharge the sums they owed to the government. The farmers, almost all of them, were put in confinement for heavy balances. They had suffered every form of punishment and disgrace. To quote the words of the district officer: "No punishment which we could have inflicted on the farmers that they had not already suffered, nor disgrace that they had not undergone before."[42] But all severities practised on them were fruitless, one and all pleading their absolute inability to pay a rupee more and all requested permission to resign their farms. One of the worst victims was the Raja of Dinajpur who was completely ruined.

When such was the condition of the farmers, the position of the raiyats had better be imagined than described. The raiyats became the worst victims of the farmers who found that their only means of escape was to shift the burden on to the shoulders of the raiyats. They levied one illegal exaction after another and collected the same with the greatest severity. Thus harassed with unending demands the raiyats were thrown into a state of total despondency. Many left their villages and migrated to other parts. But desertion on the part of one section only added to the burden imposed on the rest. Najai was collected from the remaining raiyats. Add to this the inconvenience caused by extraordinary cheapness of grain and the total want of demand for the rice produced in the country. The poor raiyats already harassed past endurance did not receive even half the reward of their labour.

Rangpur: The situation in the district of Rangpur was no better. It was hard pressed from the very commencement of the company's rule. During the rule of Mir Qasim as also during the years of the dewani the district was overloaded with very large demands. The net revenue fixed for the first years of the dewani was six lakhs of rupees when the district was more flourishing than it had been since.[43] When the five-year settlement was in-

---

[42] Proceedings of Revenue Department, 18 July 1775.

[43] Proceedings of Committee of Circuit, 16 December 1772.

troduced, it was already in a languishing condition. Yet the rate of assessment was further increased. In 1773 the district was rated at upwards of 8 lakhs of rupees net revenue which went up to 9 or 10 lakhs of rupees.

The collector of the district admitted that the increase in the demand was so immense that it was beyond the power of the district to bear. Yet he used the utmost rigour and severity on the farmers whenever they fell into arrears. After their bitter experience in the matter of collections, the farmers declared their inability to pay their rents, and desired rather to give up their lands than hold them at the prescribed rate.

The greater the severity on the farmers the more rapacious they became in their demands upon the raiyats. In Fatehpur two-anna pargana the farmer attempted to levy it by mathot, but raiyats one and all threatened to desert and he had to desist.[44] In Rangamati the farmer's oppression raised a storm of protest and caused a great commotion among the people. The government was forced to intervene and the farmer was dismissed from service.[45] In several parts of the district the raiyats deserted en masse, the land was left uncultivated and the country became desolate.

It was a woeful tale of distress and desolation in each and every district of Bengal. In fact, Bengal became the testing ground of a long series of farming experiments for a period of full twenty years (1757-77). The main actor in this drama of spoliation and ruin was the company government, their main agents were a set of Indian hirelings, and the inevitable victim of these profiteering expeditions was the raiyat, the proverbial goose that laid the golden egg.

By the year 1777 the ruination of the districts of Bengal had become so complete and the revenue arrears had reached such a height that the five-year settlement stood self-condemned. The district collectors one by one pointed out that the five-year settlement was defeating its purpose and the balances accumu-

---

[44] Ibid.

[45] Proceedings of Revenue Department, 18 July 1775.

lating to a dangerous degree, the company was "losing the substance while grasping at a shadow". It was therefore unceremoniously set aside, a commission was appointed to make an elaborate inquiry into the value of the land on the basis of which a new settlement could be made.

In 1778 the directors hit upon a remedy, they once more insisted on annual settlements—"a system which in the earlier days", observes Firminger, "they had condemned and which all experience had proved to be productive of conditions of uncertainty and distrust, and a well-nigh fatal discouragement to the extension and improvement of cultivation."

So there followed another period of indecisive experiments till the permanent settlement was introduced in 1793. The districts had another round of bitter experience of the cruel acts of oppression. Rangpur and Dinajpur were the two most ill-fated districts which were once again placed under the control of the most rapacious farmers. As the oppression in these two districts became the highest, the resistance of the raiyats also became the most formidable.

In 1783 Rangpur and Dinajpur became the scenes of a formidable peasant uprising the like of which had not been seen before during the days of the company's raj.[46]

---

[46] R. C. Dutt takes note of the formidable character of the uprising in his book—*The Economic History of India under Early British Rule*, Indian Edition (1950), pp. 61-62.

Chapter I

The Story of the Uprising

It appears that the first notice which Richard Goodlad, the collector of Rangpur, had of the uprising was on the 7th of Magh, 1189 B.S. (18 January 1783). On the 15th of Magh (26 January) the collector issued a proclamation asking the raiyats to lay down their arms, but it failed to have its desired effect.[1] By 13 February the uprising reached its peak and continued unabated till the 14th of Falgun (22 February) when after a last and decisive action the uprising was brought to an end.

For full five weeks the rebels were virtually in control of the paraganas of Tepa, Kazirhat and Kakina in the district of Rangpur and Salbaree in the district of Dinajpur. The power of Debi Singh, the farmer, was completely paralysed. Goodlad, the collector, wrote in alarm to the authorities in Calcutta: "This was perhaps the most formidable disturbance that ever happened in any district in Bengal."[2]

First Signs of the Revolt

While the actual uprising started in January 1783, its first symptoms could be discovered during the closing months of the year preceding. On 20 November 1782, Goodlad wrote a letter to the authorities in Calcutta referring to the formidable

[1] Letter from the Collector of Rangpur—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783.

[2] Letter from the Collector of Rangpur, ibid., 6 February 1783.

combinations of the raiyats in withholding their rents. The main enemy against whom these combinations were formed was Debi Singh, the farmer-in-charge of the district. Goodlad suggested that the whole weight of the government should be brought on the side of the farmer and the collector be empowered to enforce the payment of all balances due to the farmer with "unrelenting vigour".[3]

The collector, however, miscalculated. The raiyats whose patience had been exhausted refused to be overawed. They took the law into their own hands and rose in arms against the government.

Revolt Starts at Kazirhat

It appears that the first assemblage of peasants took place at Beedaltur in the pargana of Bamandanga and at Cornarmonah in Tepa. In pursuance of a plan jointly prepared by them they proceeded to Kymaree in Tepa where one Dirjinarain (Dhirajnarain?) was chosen their nawab (leader) with shouts of approbation.[4]

The raiyats belonging to different taluks assembled in great numbers and presented their nazars to Dirjinarain and Kena, their elected leaders. They took the pledge to stop paying further revenue to the government.

A body of the insurgents reached Dakhalyganj in pargana Kakina, at Salmari, and released such people as were confined there for nonpayment of revenue. They seized the amlahs of the cutchery and brought them to Balaganj in Kazirhat where the main body of the insurgents was assembled.[5] In the meantime, the raiyats had attacked the cutchery of Kishoreganj in the pargana of Kazirhat which had become one of the main

---

[3] Letter from Richard Goodlad to Committee of Revenue, 20 November 1782.

[4] Report of Rangpur Commission. It is stated in the report that the narrative of the uprising was taken from the deposition of Kena who happened to be one of its foremost leaders. Proceedings of Revenue Department, 29 March 1787.

[5] Zabanbandi of Dirjinarain enclosed in a letter of Paterson, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 29 December 1783.

targets of their attack because Sheikh Mahomed Mollah who fixed his headquarters there had earned the greatest notoriety in the matter of revenue collection. In wanton disregard of all norms and regulations, the Sheikh compelled the raiyats to sign increased kistbandi and collected the amount with the utmost rigour. He humiliated and antagonised the local zamindars who were kept confined as hostages in the cutchery while he illegally collected the revenue.

On the 6th of Magh, the Sheikh received news of a big assemblage of peasants numbering about a thousand, each peasant armed with a stick or bamboo in his hand. The Sheikh took alarm and hurriedly left Kishoreganj for Rangpur leaving the local zamindars Ramkanta and Shyam Choudhuri in charge of the cutchery, with some barkandazes at their disposal, assuring them that he would be soon back from Rangpur with a force adequate to quell the disturbance.

The next day the insurgents attacked the cutchery. Their first object of search was Sheikh Mahomed Mollah, for they wanted to kill him instantly. Finding, however, that the Sheikh had made good his escape, the insurgents burnt down the cutchery, disgraced the followers of the Sheikh and seized the two zamindars, Ramkanta and Shyam Choudhuri. The zamindars were, however, released on their pretended support to the rebel cause, but, once they were released, they fled with their families, to a place of safety in the zamindari of Rani Bhawani.[6]

The attack on the Kishoreganj cutchery was the signal for a bigger conflagration. Immediately ten thousand men assembled in one place and went to Calpany where they were divided into several parties.

Attack on Dimla Cutchery

One party came to Calcapoor, one of the Muskaree Mahals of Kazirhat. They raided the cutchery where one Govindaram

[6] Zabanbandi of (1) Rajmohan Choudhuri, (2) Baghil Sardar, (3) Manikchand—enclosed in a letter of Paterson, ibid.

Majumdar held charge. This Govindaram was the peshkar or gomostha of Gourmohan Choudhuri.[7]

Govindaram was particularly notorious for the severities and cruelties he practised upon the raiyats. He was beaten and flogged and the raiyats left him for dead. His amlahs were seized and the cutchery was plundered of all its effects.[8]

The main body of insurgents numbering about ten to twelve thousand was assembled at Kotalia. They now proposed to go to Dimla. The insurgents began their march. The men of Dimla proceeded first, then came the men of Saradhoby, Soondkernah and other places, and Dirjinarain, the nawab, followed in a palanquin.[9]

It appears that Gourmohan was himself the indirect cause of his own destruction. He thought it necessary to take into his pay 60 barkandazes for the safety of his person. He had apprehended four men in the bazar at Dimla upon suspicion of their belonging to the party of the insurgents. In order to procure their release, the raiyats, several thousand strong, proceeded towards Dimla. Gourmohan issued written orders to the barkandazes to prevent them from entering Dimla and, in case of their refusal to heed their word, to fire upon them.[10]

On the 11th of Magh the insurgents entered Dimla, where they found the horsemen and barkandazes drawn up against them, and advanced to the beating of drums. When they had approached within half of a mile of the barkandazes, the insurgents gave the duoy, declaring they had come for justice and not to fight. The barkandazes allured them with words of encouragement, promising them justice and asked the raiyats to throw down their sticks. The raiyats obeyed and approached

---

[7] Gourmohan Choudhuri was one of Debi Singh's principal agents in charge of Muskaree Mahals in Kazirhat, "a very considerable man who had three lakhs of rupees malguzari under him"—Goodlad.

[8] Zabanbandi of Zahoor Bosneah of the taluk of Calcapoor and of Rajmohan Choudhuri—enclosed in a letter of Paterson—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 29 December 1783.

[9] Zabanbandi of Dirjinarain—enclosed in a letter from Paterson, ibid. See also Report of Rangpur Commission—Proceedings of Revenue Department, 29 March 1787.

[10] Letter from Paterson—ibid.

the barkandazes. They advanced within the distance of an arrow flight when a gun was fired on them. Three of the insurgents were killed on the spot and six wounded. Inflamed at this the raiyats fell upon the barkandazes and killed one of them. The horsemen and barkandazes were alarmed and took to their heels. At this treachery the raiyats became indignant and launched an attack on the Dimla cutchery, where Gourmohan had locked himself in, knocked down with clubs everyone they could find and pulled down the buildings. They seized Gourmohan and clubbed him on the head. The insurgents entered the toshakhana (store-room), opened the chests and boxes, plundered all the cash, papers and records they could find. They carried Gourmohan to Dirjinarain, their nawab, to the south of Dimla where they killed him by cutting his head off and breaking his bones to pieces.[11]

The rebels then proceeded to Bhawaniganj and broke open the golahs in which the company's rice was stocked.[12]

At this juncture Goodlad, the collector of Rangpur, intervened. He sent two of his agents, Manikchand and Nazir Gomani, to the rebels with the purpose of appeasing them.[13] The raiyats placed before them the main points of their complaint in the form of a petition. They demanded that the tax of deerinwillah should be abolished, that the narainee rupee which was then the currency of the country should continue so that no batta was exacted upon the French arcot rupee, and that the collection of revenue should be suspended for a period of two months.[14] The collector issued a parwana in which he pro-

---

[11] Zabanbandi of (1) Rajmohan Choudhuri, brother of Gourmohan, (2) Debiprasad Sharma, a servant of Gourmohan, (3) Sheikh Maunullah, (4) Asneah, sardar of paiks in the employ of Gourmohan, (5) Jagiswar Das, tokedar (collector) of the taluk of Dimla, (6) Dirjinarain, (7) Manikchand—enclosed in letter from Paterson, ibid. Also read Report of Rangpur Commission, proceedings of Revenue Department, 29 March 1787.

[12] Letter from Goodlad to Committee of Revenue, 27 January 1783.

[13] Zabanbandi of Manikchand, Goodlad's agent—enclosed in letter from Paterson—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue 29 December 1783.

[14] Ibid.

mised the raiyats redress of their first two complaints but rejected the third. Dirjinarain, the nawab of the uprising, and several other head raiyats received the parwana, gave it their careful consideration and, though not fully satisfied, decided to lay down their arms and return home. The rebels informed the collector of their decision and actually dispersed according to their promise.[15]

But Goodlad was not as good as his word. He broke all the promises he had made. Sezawals were again sent into the mofussil. The same most hated persons were selected to carry out the task of collection. Sheikh Mahomed Mollah was sent to Kazirhat, Ramdulal Bhattacharya to Kakina and Gokul Mehta to pargana Tepa.[16] They made their collections not in agreement with the terms of Goodlad's parwana but in flagrant violation of the same they continued to collect illegal taxes.[17] The result was that the raiyats lost all confidence in the assurance of redress given to them by the collector himself. They discovered that they had been deceived and found themselves faced with no alternative other than taking up arms again in defence of their rights and dignity.

"THE SECOND REVOLT"

The uprising now entered upon a new and more intensive phase of development. This time the centres of operation were Kakina and Tepa. Upon his arrival at Kakina Ramdulal Bhattacharya, the farmer's agent, issued tullab chithis (bills in demand of revenue). Accompanied and assisted by barkandazes and horsemen, Ramdulal made an attempt at enforcing collection from the raiyats according to the old rates. Some of the raiyats were seized by the horsemen, some of them found their houses burnt and their women disgraced.

Inflamed by the activities of Ramdulal three or four thousand

---

[15] Ibid.

[16] Minutes of Council Meeting—Fort William, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, published by Nashipur Raj Estate, 1914, pp. 31-32.

[17] Letter from Paterson—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 23 September 1783.

raiyats assembled and in a body proceeded against him. A subadar at the head of a detachment of sepoys was sent to Ramdulal's assistance. The sepoys fell upon the rebels who, though they succeeded in wounding a horseman, failed to hold out for long and retreated. Seven of the rebels were taken prisoner and despatched to Rangpur under heavy guard. While on their way they were confronted by several thousand people who snatched away the prisoners.

Near Hat Suteebaree nearly 10,000 raiyats assembled. They made a surprise attack on Ramdulal who was staying in the cutchery of Firmanbaree. But owing to the instruction of Manikchand, the farmer's emissary who promised the raiyats redress of their grievances, the insurrection did not spread further in Kakina.[18]

The Centre of the Revolt Shifts to Tepa

While Ramdulal was sent to Kakina, Gokul Mehta, an equally hated naib, was sent by farmer Debi Singh to Sewrabaree in Tepa to make collections from the raiyats. Like Ramdulal, he also came accompanied by a jamadar at the head of a body of barkandazes and some horsemen. Word went round that the hated Gokul Mehta had come again to carry on collections at Tepa and alarming rumours spread that he had come to burn the houses of peasants.

To meet the grave situation the raiyats quickly closed their ranks. Kena Sarkar was appointed nawab and Ramprasad sardar of the insurgents.

It was a market day (28th of Magh or 13 February), the raiyats had assembled at the market-place in large numbers. Gokul Mehta took his position on the bank of a tank near the market-place and ordered the barkandazes and horsemen to start an attack upon the villagers. The raiyats gave the durahee (duoy) and said: give us justice, why do you come to kill us? Gokul Mehta beckoned them to approach him, assuring them redress. A large number of raiyats proceeded towards Gokul

[18] Zabanbandi of Manikchand enclosed in letter from Paterson, 29 December 1783. (Also *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 31-32.)

Mehta—some having already thrown down their clubs and some others still carrying theirs under their arms. When they had approached within an arrow's flight the horsemen charged upon them at full speed, shooting their guns and arrows at them. Two raiyats were wounded. This enraged the raiyats to such a degree that they surrounded Gokul Mehta and instantly killed him. Seven or eight members of Gokul Mehta's party, including the jamadar and other barkandazes, fell into their hands.[19]

Revolt Spreads to Dinajpur

The uprising soon spread to Dinajpur. A body of the rebels entered by the western border. The raiyats, who had been the worst victims of the terror unleashed by the farmer, lost no time in joining them. In Boda the raiyats became incensed, attacked the cutchery and carried away the underfarmer. The raiyats of Saal Ullah in the pargana of Moorpoor led an attack against the local office, raided and plundered the cutchery and released several persons who had been confined there for their failure to meet the high revenue demand. Likewise, the raiyats of Allanchurry in Shajahanpore and those of Dhee Hat and Baragang in Salbaree obstructed the collection of revenue and drove away the officers from the local cutcheries. The biggest trouble spot in Dinajpur was, however, Dhee Jamta. Here lived Kriparam Bose, one of Debi Singh's notorious agents. Under him flogging and unauthorised confinement of raiyats had become the order of the day. Now as the news of the success of the raiyats poured in, those confined within the cutchery felt inspired. After a hurried consultation among themselves, they knocked off their fetters and handcuffs and rose in arms. About the 19th of Magh a thousand raiyats assembled, attacked the cutchery, beat up Kriparam Bose, the sezawal and their amlahs, plundered the cutchery of what

---

[19] (i) Zabanbandi of Sheikh Unaitullah in the employ of Gokul Mehta —enclosed in a letter from Paterson, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 29 December 1783. (ii) Letter from Goodlad, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783. (iii) Report of Rangpur Commission, Proceedings of Revenue Department, 29 March 1787.

money was there and carried off the papers (the daftars of accounts). They made prisoner of Kriparam Bose and the rest of the officers of the cutchery and carried them off to Chenglee.

Faced now with the possibility of the uprising spreading beyond the limits of Rangpur, Goodlad resolved to put it down by force. He instructed Mirza Mahomed Tuckee, who had been charged with the superintendence of Boda and had been provided with a large force, to act in conjunction with Lt Macdonald who had already been despatched westward with a party of sepoys.

In the meantime, with the approval of the collector, parwanas were issued by the farmer to intimidate the raiyats into submission. In similar parwanas that were addressed to the agents and managers of the parganas of Beluah, Angeena Mahomedpur, Bagedpore, Dhee Hat, Shajahanpore, etc., they were ordered to set fire to the houses of the recalcitrant raiyats, to attach their crops and property, to seize their wives and children and to bind them hand and foot. In a parwana addressed to Mirza Mahomed Tuckee by Goodlad himself, it was stated: "Whether in Boda or Salbaree where evil disposed persons have raised their hands, immediately attack them and if they appear with arms, you will kill them without any apprehensions... You will single out some in order to excite terror and expose them publicly as examples and in whatever villages these evil disposed people may be, you will set fire to that village and seize and make the whole of them prisoners."

Mahomed Tuckee acted strictly according to the collector's instruction. He terrorised the raiyats and forced them to lay down their arms. The sezawal and the amlahs who were arrested by the rebels were rescued, the money was recovered, and the rebel leaders were arrested. Nandaram, his son Hari and Sufdil who were the top leaders were humiliated with their faces smeared black and white. They were carried by Mahomed Tuckee through the district.[20]

---

[20] (i) Enclosures in the letter from Paterson—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 23 September 1783. These enclosures contain the zabanbandi of Nandaram and Sufdil, leaders of the uprising, the text of parwanas circulated by the farmer and also parwanas circulated by

REVOLT TAKES THE CHARACTER OF A PEASANT WAR

So far as Rangpur was concerned things were not so easy. The situation had gone completely beyond the control of the government. The attack on Gokul Mehta at Tepa was the signal for a much greater conflagration throughout the district. Goodlad, the collector, was thrown into a great panic. He apprehended that the incidents in Tepa marked the beginning of "a second general revolt".[21] He wrote to Lt Macdonald who had his headquarters at Calpany: "The whole country you have settled is again on the point of revolt."[22] He described the situation as the most critical that a collector was ever placed in.

While issuing instructions to Lt Macdonald, Goodlad observed: "In emergency of this nature if I adhere strictly to the letter of my authority it will be impossible for us to remain in the district and as a disturbance so violent never before happened in Bengal and is consequently not provided against by government, I am obliged of my own accord to adopt such measures as I deem most essential for the public safety."

The collector felt that lenity had been tried but failed. So he now wanted to see "what effect severity will have on them".

As a measure of severity the collector directed Lt Macdonald that on apprehending any such bosneahs (who had earlier tendered their submission but had again joined the revolt) he should immediately hang up one or two of the leaders as a public example. If this were not done, the collector added, there was no hope of being able in any shape to get the better of this insurrection. "It is with great concern", he wrote, "I issue you an order of this kind, but the matters are now at such an alarming height that nothing but an uncommon act of au-

---

Goodlad. (ii) Letter from Goodlad to Committee of Revenue, 6 February 1783. (iii) Report of Rangpur Commission—Proceedings of Revenue Department, 29 March 1787.

[21] Letter from Goodlad—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783.

[22] Instructions to Lt Macdonald—enclosed in letter from Goodlad, ibid.

thority can surmount it and I plainly see unless you execute with vigour the orders I now give you, every officer in the country belonging to the farmer will be murdered."[23]

Apprehending a general conflagration after the murder of Gokul Mehta at Tepa, Goodlad gathered detailed information about the movements of the rebels. He discovered that the rebels had divided themselves into six or seven different bodies and assembled in different parts of the district of Rangpur.[24] What appeared to him to be even more alarming was the report that a body of the rebels had gone into Cooch Behar and had urged upon the raiyats there to join them, another had gone into Dinajpur by the western border, and a third had gone into the parganas of Andewah etc. to the north.[25]

To meet the situation, Goodlad took counter-measures. He despatched Lt Macdonald with a party of sepoys to the west. He gave Mirza Mahomed Tuckee a large force to prevent the raiyats from entering Dinajpur. A third party he sent against the raiyats in Andewah, and a fourth to the north.[26] He gave them all orders, wherever they came up with the raiyats, to take as many of them prisoner as they could, to burn their houses, and if they made the least resistance, to fire upon them.[27]

Lt Macdonald reached the western frontier of the district of Rangpur. He came up with a large party of rebels. He arrested 28 of them, among whom were several of their leaders.[28] He burnt the houses of some respectable raiyats and threatened that if anybody resisted him, he would fire on them. He arrested a person in the bazar at Calpany. The unfortunate fellow, on the basis of mere suspicion, was hanged in the market-place. Justifying his own action, Lt Macdonald writes: "This being a market-day here, I judged that a public example

---

[23] Ibid.

[24] Letter from Goodlad, ibid.

[25] Letter from Goodlad to Committee of Revenue, 6 February 1783.

[26] Letter from Goodlad—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Letter from Goodlad to Committee of Revenue, 6 February 1783.

in the presence of so many would strike terror into the rest, and that the accounts of it would soon spread over the country."[29] Similarly, a bairagi who lived on charity was seized and hanged. These two and many others were killed in cold blood. The threat of military execution forced the raiyats to lay down their arms.

The party sent to Andewah also came upon a large body of rebels. 800 of them (mostly of Dinajpur) were captured, their houses burnt and plundered, and the villagers were terrorised into submission.[30]

Goodlad observed that the party of the rebels who went north gave him more trouble than all the rest. They surrounded the party the collector had sent against them. Goodlad remarked that had he not reinforced the party with a subadar and 30 sepoys they would certainly have been cut off. One of the barkandazes was shot by the rebels through the body.[31] He died of his wounds two days later. Seven of the prisoners who were being sent down to the collector were rescued by the rebels on the way.[32]

The rebels mustered strong and made a desperate effort to defend their cause. Several clashes ensued in consequence.

On the 8th of Falgun, the subadar came upon a party who were on their march to burn Mughalhat, where an engagement took place. At noon a mob of one thousand, amongst whom were about one or two hundred archers, came prepared to fight with the subadar and the jamadar and from a thicket of bamboos began to let fly their arrows. The subadar likewise began to fire his matchlocks with balls. The headman named Nuruluddin, who had assumed the title of the nawab of the local rebels, was wounded and taken prisoner. His dewan, Dayasheel, was killed together with four other raiyats. Nurul-

---

[29] Letter from Lt Macdonald to Goodlad—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783.

[30] Letter from Goodlad to Committee of Revenue, 6 February 1783.

[31] Letter from Goodlad—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783.

[32] Letter from Goodlad to Committee of Revenue, 6 February 1783.

uddin died of his wounds two days after.[33]

After this the rebels marched to the northwest in the direction of Patgong where they were joined by a vast multitude. Lt Macdonald attacked them at different times and several people were killed. The last and decisive action took place on 22 February.[34] From Lt Macdonald's report to Goodlad it is known that about dawn on the day he came upon the rebels who were very numerous and the greater part of them were armed with bows and arrows, lances and spears. Lt Macdonald advised the sepoys to disguise themselves by covering themselves with white clothes. The rebels allowed them to come very near taking them for barkandazes of whom they were not afraid. The sepoys when near enough threw off the white clothes and fired about three rounds, and then charged them with their swords. A great many were killed and wounded. The jamadar counted upwards of sixty dead on the plain. Fifty-six were taken prisoner of whom one died of his wounds on the road.[35]

The battle of Patgong marked the end of the uprising.

The raiyats of Rangpur cried for bread but they were given stones. They were driven to desperation by the cynical indifference displayed by the government. They took the law into their own hands and made a desperate bid to enforce justice. The government acted immediately and their actions were guided by the maxim—"might is right". A reign of terror was established throughout the district of Rangpur. The raiyats took their chance and bravely waged a war against the government. But they failed, simply because it was an unequal fight. The raiyats were left without any choice; due to fear of military execution they returned home.

It was a sad end to a glorious endeavour, on the part of the people to live and live with honour and justice.

---

[33] Letter from Goodlad—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783. (Also zabanbandi of Manikchand enclosed in letter of Paterson—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 29 December 1783.)

[34] Letter from Goodlad, ibid.

[35] Letter from Lt Macdonald to Goodlad, ibid.

Chapter II

The Nature of the Uprising

It was in the interest of Debi Singh as also Goodlad to prove that the revolt was not a genuine peasant uprising.

Debi Singh wanted to establish the facts that (i) the zamindars were the real inciters of the uprising, (ii) Dirjinarain, the nawab, was an instrument of the zamindars who sought to utilise the fact of an uprising in order to evade payment of heavy outstanding revenue to the government, (iii) the charges of extortion and oppression were only to cloak the real designs of the rebels and had no foundation in reality.[1]

Debi Singh resorted to forgery and bribery to prove his case. He forged certain letters under the supposed seals of the zamindars to prove that they had taken an active part in inciting the uprising.[2] He also offered bribes to Dirjinarain while in jail to make him come over to his side. Goodlad, the collector of Rangpur, was equally interested in proving that the zamindars were the inciters of the revolt and the peasants had hardly any grievances to complain of. On 27 January 1783 Goodlad wrote: "It is unlikely that the ryots can have any just cause to complain of oppression. From what opinion I can form from the present appearance of circumstances, I believe the whole

[1] Letter from Paterson to the Governor-General in Council (with enclosures)—dated Calcutta, 6 June 1785, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 273-74.

[2] Letter from Paterson to the Governor-General in Council, dated Calcutta, 13 April 1787, ibid, p. 421.

of this tumult has risen from the zamindars of Carjeehat (Kazirhat)."[3] Working on this hypothesis Goodlad issued notices proclaiming the above zamindars criminals. They were dispossessed of their zamindari and orders were given for their sale for the realisation of outstanding balances.[4]

Paterson does not find any truth in the assertions made by Goodlad or Debi Singh. About the zamindars of Rangpur in general, he writes, they had unlike other zamindars neither wealth nor authority nor so much influence over the raiyats.[5] Explaining why Debi Singh seized upon the case of Kazirhat zamindars, Paterson remarks: "The zamindars of Carjeehat (Kazirhat) have been more injured by him than any other and of course their complaints are the loudest and the strongest against him. It is, therefore, his interest to divert the attention of the government from his own crimes, by endeavouring to recriminate, the usual and last resource of bad men when they find themselves falling."[6] Further, Paterson writes, in the whole of the inquiry respecting the insurrection, there has not appeared a single allusion against them.

On the day when the revolt broke out the zamindars of Kazirhat were, on a charge of nonpayment of revenue, arrested and put in chains. They were themselves the victims of Debi Singh's oppression, which roused the sympathy of their raiyats who quickly secured their release. The raiyats wanted them to take the lead and help them with their arms. The zamindars however calculated differently, they took to their heels and sought shelter in the zamindari of Rani Bhawani.[7]

So untenable were the charges of Debi Singh against the zamindars that even the Rangpur commission declared the

---

[3] Letter from Goodlad to the Committee of Revenue, ibid, p. 323.

[4] Translation of sunud granted to Sheikh Mahomed Mollah under the hand and seal of Richard Goodlad as collector, dated 28 January 1783, ibid, p. 301.

[5] Report from Paterson—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 23 September 1783.

[6] Letter from Paterson, ibid, 29 December 1783.

[7] Zabanbadi of Baghil Sardar—enclosed in Paterson's letter to Committee of Revenue, ibid.

letters on which he based his accusations as forged, though for that forgery they put the blame not on Debi Singh, the prime mover in the entire ocean of trickery and chicanery, but on Dirjinarain who was an unwilling tool in his hands.

The Rangpur commissioners were constrained to admit that the papers and documents on which Debi Singh based his accusations "cannot in any degree tend to prove that the zamindars were the instigators of the insurrection".[8]

The Role of the Bosneahs

Actually the revolt of 1783 was a genuine peasant uprising. It was led by the village headmen or the bosneahs as they were called. The raiyats were guided by them in all their engagements with the zamindars or farmers. They were a very numerous body of men and were more particularly exposed to the violence of oppression by virtue of their social position.[9] This circumstance rendered them best suited to be the actual leaders of the uprising.[10]

It should be borne in mind that the bosneahs were themselves raiyats. Like the poorer raiyats the bosneahs or the head raiyats also groaned under the burden of the farming system. Their interests being therefore common, they could take a united stand against the farming system.

It is beyond doubt that the bosneahs played a considerable part in the revolt. The nawab of the uprising, Dirjinarain Thakur, was himself a bosneah of the taluk of Kymaree in the Bengali year 1188-89. He was dismissed from his charge

---

[8] Report submitted by the Rangpur Commission, dated 23 March 1786, *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 586-87.

[9] Letter from Paterson to Committee of Revenue—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 23 September 1783.

[10] About the term "bosneah", E. G. Glazier in his Report on the District of Rangpur (1873) writes—"The term *bosneah* has now gone a good deal out of use, yielding to *mandal* or *pradhan*—but in the last century, *bosneah* was the name most generally recognised for the heads of villages. In the Dimla disturbance, the *bosneahs* were always the leaders and spokesmen of the ryots."

by Debi Singh, the new farmer of the district.[11] Not only the nawab but the dewan and the bakshi of the rebel camp also came from the ranks of the bosneahs, pramaniks and patwaris. Baneswar, the dewan, was the pramanik of the taluk of Salmari. Nuruluddin, the bakshi, was the bosneah of the taluk of Suttenah. Other bosneahs prominent among the rebels were Bhoodaroo Bosneah of the taluk of Ram Chandee, Buroo Bosneah of the taluk of Haldibaree, Khema Bosneah of the taluk of Cheringah, etc.[12]

From a summons sent by the rebels to the villagers it appears that each bosneah was given the responsibility of assembling the entire peasantry under his charge.[13]

The role of the bosneahs also comes into bold relief from the observations of Goodlad who in his instructions to Lt Macdonald stated: "If among those you capture you should find any of the bosneahs... I do direct that on your apprehending such bosneahs, you immediately hang up one or two of the most guilty as a public example."[14]

A Peasant Uprising

At the same time, it will be wrong to assume that the revolt was the work of a few designing bosneahs only. In reality, it was the revolt of the entire people. As the agent of the opium contractor wrote from Rangpur to the president of the com-

---

[11] Zazanbandi of Dirjinarain Sharma—enclosed in Paterson's letter to Committee of Revenue—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 29 December 1783.

[12] Zabanbandi of Manickchand, enclosed in Paterson's letter, ibid.

[13] Zabanbandi of Shah Aboo Ali Fakir, enclosed in it is the text of the summons which runs as follows:

Summons of the undermentioned persons, chakla of Coochwarah 1189, 13th Magh—

Mabullah Bosneah, inhabitant of the taluk of Doobey Archerry, etc., upon sight of this summons, bring all the inhabitants of the taluks that are under your care, in case of delay you will suffer.

Sent in charge of 5 paiks belonging to Uddhab Sardar.

—ibid.

[14] Letter from Goodlad to Committee of Revenue, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783.

mittee of revenue, "the whole body of the people are in arms".[15]

Paterson, who was overwhelmed by petitions from crowds of raiyats, also wrote to the committee of revenue to the effect that it was not the act of a few but 50,000 or 100,000 were involved in it.[16]

The mass character of the revolt is reflected in the huge assemblage of peasants in times of action. At Kotalia near Saradhoby ten or twelve thousand rebels assembled.[17] At Kakina nearly ten thousand assembled near Hat Suteebaree.[18] In Tepa the rebels likewise assembled in thousands.

The murder of Gourmohan or that of Gokul Mehta was not premeditated, it was caused by mass indignation. The common people took revenge upon their immediate oppressors.

The peasant character of the revolt is borne out both by official and nonofficial reports. The committee of revenue which based its reports on the information furnished by Goodlad takes note of mass participation by the villagers in the attacks on the cutcheries.

The peasant character of the revolt is also borne out by the mass of local evidence collected on the spot. Sheikh Mahomed Mollah when he heard of a big assemblage at Kadagaon and Magurrah sent a party of paiks to know at first hand the nature of the assemblage. The paiks made a survey on the spot and came back and reported to him that there might be a thousand or five hundred men. "Each of these peasants has a stick or bamboo in his hand, their dress is like that of the ryots or villagers, they are neither sepahis, fakirs or night robbers."[19]

It is wrong to think, as Goodlad does, that the poorer raiyats who took part in the uprising were only "a deluded multitude

---

[15] Letter from H. Howorth, agent of the Opium Contractor to Committee of Revenue, ibid., 3 March 1783.

[16] Letter from Paterson to Committee of Revenue, ibid., 3 July 1783.

[17] Zabanbandi of Jaguissar Das Tokedar of the taluk of Dimla—enclosed in Paterson's letter to Committee of Revenue, ibid., 29 December 1783.

[18] Zabanbandi of Manickchand, ibid.

[19] Zabanbandi of Baghil Sardar, ibid.

led on by their more designing bosseneyaly".[20] The poorer raiyats completely identified themselves with the cause of their leaders. Paterson states that when the leaders of the insurrection were apprehended, the entire peasantry became alarmed. Each raiyat warned himself that the next turn might be his. As the raiyats themselves said: "If they (the leaders) are guilty so are we all."[21]

There is lot of evidence to prove that the poorer raiyats showed a marvellous initiative throughout the course of the uprising. When the paiks sent by the zamindars of Kazirhat asked the members of a peasant assemblage, who they were and who was their sardar or leader, they answered: "We are our own leaders and we are going to obtain justice."[22]

This is also corroborated by Dirjinarain's evidence. When he was asked: "In what light did the raiyats consider you?", Dirjinarain answered: "Like another raiyat."[23]

The peasants did not even hesitate to turn against their leaders when they lacked in firmness. For example, when the nawab of the uprising, Dirjinarain, requested the assembled raiyats not to murder Gourmohan (who was a source of great oppression to them) on the ground that he was a Brahmin, his orders were flatly disobeyed and two hundred raiyats surged forward and killed the Brahmin on the spot.[24]

Hindu-Muslim Unity

One of the most distinguishing features of the revolt was that it was throughout marked by a rare combination of Hindus and Muslims. The scores of petitions which were sent to Goodlad

---

[20] Letter from Goodlad to Committee of Revenue, ibid., 24 March 1783.

[21] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 3 July 1783.

[22] Zabanbandi of Baghil Sardar, op. cit.

[23] *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 450-51.

[24] Zabanbandi of Dirjinarain, also of Baghil Sardar—enclosed in Paterson's Letter to Committee of Revenue, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 29 December 1783.

contained the signatures of both Hindu and Muslim bosneahs. For example, a Bengali paper enclosed in one of Goodlad's letters to Paterson contained the signatures of such Muslim village leaders as Sheikh Habshee, Sheikh Cavil, Rahamat, Abdul, Alivardi, etc. along with the names of Hindu leaders like Dayaram Das, Humarain Das, Raghu Das, Baneswar Das, etc.[25] A fakir from Tepa in his statement to Paterson also mentions the names of some Muslim and Hindu bosneahs who approached him to write a summons to be circulated among the raiyats. Apart from the names of a number of Muslim bosneahs he specially refers to the Hindu bosneah of the taluk of Balagong and the sardar of the taluk of Barabeetah.[26]

As a matter of fact, the revolt was as much the handiwork of the Muslims as of the Hindus. Dirjinarain and Kena Sarkar, both Hindus, acted on different occasions as the nawab of the uprising, Nuruluddin Bosneah and Israel Khan, both Muslims, acted as bakshi and sardar respectively.

Examples are there when the Hindu sardars wrote to the Muslim bosneahs to join the action along with all the peasants under their charge (summons sent by Uddhab Sardar to Mobullah Bosneah). Similarly, there were instances when the Hindu peasants fought desperately under the leadership of Muslim leaders. At Kakina, for example, Hindus and Muslims fought side by side under the leadership of Nuruluddin Bosneah; Dayasheel Bosneah was killed in the battle and Nuruluddin Bosneah was wounded by a bayonet and died.[27]

In fact, the village people participated in the revolt irrespective of their caste, community and creed. Neither caste distinctions nor communal differences obstructed the march of events. The exploited masses of the peasantry fought unitedly against the exploiters. Really, the peasant uprising of 1783 was an example of class struggle par excellence.

---

25 Paterson's Report, ibid., 23 September 1783.

26 Zabanbandi of Shah Aboo Ali Fakir—enclosed in Paterson's Report, ibid., 29 December 1783.

27 Zabanbandi of Manickchand, ibid.

An Armed Revolt

The uprising was caused by gross acts of provocation from the farmer. Only when all attempts at negotiation failed, the peasants took up arms as the last resort.

It was then the practice of the raiyats in Bengal to write arzis or petitions, or to go on a deputation to the local officers, for any redress of their grievances. When the local officers failed, they sometimes sent their representatives to Calcutta. Following the same example, towards the close of the year 1189, the raiyats of pargana Kundi assembled together and presented a petition to Goodlad, the chief of the district. Goodlad failed to give them any redress. On the contrary, he referred the matter to the farmer who abused the petitioners and threatened them with dire consequences.[28]

On another occasion the small talukdars and the bosneahs filed a complaint before Goodlad against the farmer. That gentleman said, "Go to Raja Debi Singh. What do you come to me for?" In consequence of this order, the talukdars and bosneahs went to Debi Singh and presented their petition, for which he had them flogged with split bamboos and detained them in his private prison. After this no other farmers, bosneahs or raiyats complained to Goodlad.[29]

In a representation to Paterson the zamindars of Rangpur complained: "There was no just magistrate to pay heed to our grievances or give us redress."[30]

Thus when all efforts at a peaceful solution failed, the raiyats as a last resort took the law into their hands. They formed a powerful combination and resolved to resist all acts of oppression.

At the outset the raiyats assembled at fixed places in large numbers. Next they sent circular letters inviting others to join.[31]

---

[28] Muchleka given in writing by Habshee Mandal and Cabel Pramanik, inhabitants of pargana Kundi—enclosed in Paterson's Report, ibid., 23 September 1783.

[29] *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 284-85.

[30] Ibid., p. 281.

[31] The *Ding* Sardar Israel Khan sent the following intelligence to

Sometimes the raiyats of one district wrote even to those of the adjoining district calling on them to join the common cause.[32]

The farmer spared no pains to crush the combination of the peasants by force. He gave orders to the effect that wherever the raiyats were found to be in a riotous disposition they were to be seized and their property plundered and their houses were to be burnt down.[33]

This all the more hardened the determination of the raiyats. The armed attacks of the farmer increasingly met with armed resistance.

The rebels beat a drum in each taluk and, coming out of their respective houses, armed with swords, shields, bows and arrows and clubs, assembled in large numbers.[34] At Tepa 500 peasants assembled with sticks in their hands and spears and raibanshes (poles tipped with iron and decorated with horse

---

the raiyats (this was addressed to no particular person) through one of his paiks:

"This of consequence. We have all joined and assembled at Jarbana. You are our brothers. Do you join with all the expedition. If you do not join us on our arrival you will repent it. When you join us we will consult what is best to be done. If you do not come we will burn your houses. You have warning."

(Signed) Serrey Sighey.

Enclosed in Goodlad's letter—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 17 February 1783.

32 The raiyats of the taluk of Kazirhat in Rangpur wrote to the raiyats of Sarkar Pinjirah in Dinajpur in the following terms:

"We have made an insurrection... All Coochwanah (Rangpur) are come forth. Do you do the same and join us. We have surrounded the Raja at Rangpur with the nazir's people. The rest is left to chance. Do you pay no more revenue. In this letter we give you information. If you come, it is well; if not you will repent it, after which you must not blame us. People are therefore sent to you. You will give them victuals."

(Signed) Hurry Doss (Dewan).

—ibid.

33 Parwanas under the seal of Bahadur Singh, nominal farmer of the zilla of Dinajpur—enclosed in Paterson's letter, ibid., 23 September 1783.

34 Zabanbandi of Manickchand, ibid., 29 December 1783.

tails).[35] At Gobdah Nuruluddin Bosneah mobilised one thousand men amongst whom were about one or two hundred archers. At Saradhoby, the number of rebels assembled was quite large, and the greater part of them were armed with bows and arrows, lances and spears.[36]

The militancy which the rebels displayed surprised Goodlad. They flogged Debi Singh's agents who happened to be the main targets of their attack. They set fire to the cutcheries, plundered the cash, broke open the golahs, and burnt the documents sanctioning acts of oppression. When any of the rebels was taken prisoner, the raiyats would in most cases assemble in thousands, surround the guards and snatch away the prisoner.[37]

Goodlad in trying to convey an adequate idea of the violent temper of the rebels observed: "I had reason, with every other inhabitant of Rangpur, to apprehend that the public treasury, the town of Rangpur, and the company's factory would be attacked and plundered."[38]

Goodlad had to mobilise the entire military power of the company and only after a series of pitched battles in which the raiyats fought to the last he succeeded in crushing the rebellion.

A Rebel Government

When the uprising reached its peak, the rebels formed a government of their own. They appointed all the officers necessary to run a regular government,[39] for example, the nawab, the dewan, the bakshi, etc. Below the highest officers there were quite a large number of officers of a subordinate rank

[35] Zabanbandi of Sheikh Enayetullah, ibid.

[36] Letter from Lt. Macdonald—enclosed in Goodlad's Report, ibid., 24 March 1783.

[37] Zabanbandi of Manickchand, ibid., 29 December 1783.

[38] Letter from Goodlad, dated Calcutta, 29 November 1784; *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, p. 213.

[39] Letter from Goodlad to Committee of Revenue—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783. Also letter from Goodlad to the Governor-General, dated Calcutta, 24 November 1786 reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 462-64.

known as sardars. Dirjinarain was elected the nawab. Baneswar, son of Basser Pramanik of the taluk of Salmari, was elected the dewan.[40]

The rebel government issued proclamations forbidding all payments of revenue to the existing government in the country.[41] It also levied a tax throughout the country under the head of ding khurtcha ("insurrection charges") to defray the expenses of the uprising.[42]

It also appears that in this uprising there were, apart from the central leaders, a large number of local leaders too. The local organisation was a miniature of the central organisation. Let us take, for example, the local organisations of Kakina and Tepa. In Kakina we find one Bhut Sardar acting as the nawab, and one Tolah Bosneah as dewan.[43] In Tepa the rebels elected Kena Sarkar as their nawab and Ramprasad as their sardar.[44]

LEADERS OF THE INSURRECTION

Thirty-two-year-old Dirjinarain (Dhirajnarain?) Sharma, the nawab of the uprising, was a Brahmin by caste. He was the bosneah of Kymaree in pargana Tepa. He used to pay revenue to the government to the extent of Rs 3,500 per annum. He could read and write Bengali.[45] Immediately before the uprising, he was dismissed from his post by the zamindar of Tepa. His successor who was an unscrupulous man employed the most oppressive methods to realise rent from the raiyats but failed to collect much. He therefore prevailed upon Dirjinarain to act as his deputy in the work of collection.[46] From

[40] Zabanbandi of Manickchand—enclosed in Paterson's Report, ibid., 29 December 1783.

[41] Letter from Goodlad to Governor-General—reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 462-64.

[42] Letter from Goodlad—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783.

[43] Zabanbandi of Manickchand, ibid., 29 December 1783.

[44] Report of Rangpur Commission, dated 23 March 1786—reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 581-84.

[45] Interrogation of Dirjinarain before the Board, ibid., pp. 450-55.

[46] Zabanbandi of Dirjinarain—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 29 December 1783.

this it appears that Dirjinarain was a man of some influence and was popular with the raiyats.

At the same time, the facts at our disposal indicate that Dirjinarain was in a manner the nominal leader of the uprising.[47] It is likely that he was elected the nawab of the uprising because his father had acted in that capacity in a similar revolt against the Mughal government that had taken place in the district about five and twenty years before.[48] Once elected nawab, Dirjinarain, however, showed much courage and endurance. While in imprisonment in Rangpur, he was at times treated with much severity. At the same time Debi Singh offered him bribes many times through his agents, but every time Dirjinarain resisted temptation.

If Dirjinarain is to be believed Kena Sarkar of Gotamari in the pargana of Kakina was the real leader of the uprising. It was he who had induced him (Dirjinarain) to join the rebels.[49]

The deposition of Dirjinarain also throws some light on the character and integrity of Kena Sarkar as a leader. It is stated that Debi Singh offered to Kena a bribe of 6,000 rupees. But he spurned the offer.

It may be possible that as in the "second revolt" so in the first, Kena Sarkar was the real leader of the rebels. But at the outset he did not like to stand forth as the nawab. Dirjinarain by virtue of his caste, position and ancestry was considered to be the better choice in adorning the highest office among the rebels.

The revolt threw up a whole group of leaders all of whom like Dirjinarain and Kena came from the peasant stock. If the social background of the leaders is any indication, it was a peasant uprising from the beginning to the end.

While mentioning the strong points of the peasant uprising, one cannot lose sight of its inherent weaknesses, which were numerous.

The leaders had a very superficial knowledge of the situation

---

[47] Ibid. (Also *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 450-55.)

[48] *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 410, 579.

[49] Zabanbandi of Dirjinarain, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 29 December 1783.

they were called upon to deal with. In the beginning they laboured under the idea that the farmer was the evil-doer and was the only enemy to be confronted. They sought to make a fine distinction between the farmer and the government and worked under the illusion that the armed strength of the government would not be employed against them. Kena Sarkar declared to the rebels: "Why should Choudhuri make war upon us, we will not act against the representatives of government."[50] But very soon they were disillusioned and found the entire might of the government ranged against them.

The peasants knew nothing about the art of warfare. Their arms consisted of clubs, spears and arrows. Before the immensely superior armed might of the government the defeat of the peasants was inevitable.

[50] Ibid.

Chapter III

The Causes of the Uprising

The reports pouring in convinced the authorities in Calcutta that the revolt had been "very extensive and alarming".[1] They had therefore to take a serious view of the situation. They decided to depute a special commission in the person of David Paterson to Rangpur with the purpose of investigating the true cause of the insurrection.[2]

Universal Complaint

When Paterson reached Rangpur he found the greatest part of the country deserted.[3] He was surrounded by multitudes of raiyats crying for redress. He wrote that crowds of raiyats were every day coming with petitions from every pargana and village.[4] He also received petitions from great numbers of raiyats who had fled the country. He brought to the notice of the authorities in Calcutta that in the insurrection thousands of people were involved; the disaffection had been nearly as extensive as the oppression.[5] Paterson became convinced that the oppression had been so unbearable that the raiyats were goaded on to rebellion. He observed that there had

---

[1] Letter from the Acting President of the Supreme Council to the Board—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 3 March 1783.

[2] Resolution of Committee of Revenue, ibid., 17 February 1783.

[3] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 31 March 1783.

[4] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 17 March 1783.

[5] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 3 July 1783.

been oppressions of such a nature that it would have been a wonder if the people had not risen.[6]

This was Paterson's first reaction after he had reached Rangpur. In the course of his investigation he found out that the acts of oppression were even more numerous than he had supposed and that they provided sufficient reason for universal resistance.

Paterson came across mainly two sets of grievances, one from the zamindars and the other from the raiyats.

THE COMPLAINTS OF THE ZAMINDARS

The grievances which the zamindars ventilated may be listed as folows[7]: (1) The jumma was increased beyond the country's ability to pay. (2) Compulsion was employed on the zamindars to sign agreements for the revenue at an increased jumma. Compulsion was used again when the zamindars fell in arrears. They were confined within their cutcheries and other persons were employed superseding their authority in their own zamindaris. (3) Unauthorised taxes were imposed over and above the jumma and various other forms of illegal exactions were practised. (4) Trickery connected with different coins was another universal complaint. Exorbitant batta and short weight were charged upon the zamindars, which meant that the demands for revenue were increased. (5) Forcible alienation of land was another complaint. The zamindaris, taluks, and khamar lands, etc. were sold below value. (6) Excessive severities including different forms of physical violence were exercised to compel payment of the farmer's demands.

The zamindars of Kazirhat, Tepa, Panga, Boda, Kundi, Monthana, Bamandanga, Fatehpur—all of them, one after another, complained about compulsion exercised upon them to sign agreements for increased jumma. Paterson examined these complaints and became convinced that the farmer's demands

---

[6] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 31 March 1783.

[7] Letter from Committee of Revenue to the Governor-General and Council, ibid., 27 January 1784.

were unjustifiable. Tracing the circumstances in which the increased jumma was imposed, Paterson observed: "Prior to Raja Debi Singh's lease, the zilla of Rangpur from various causes had been falling off and its resources so diminished that the balances of the year 1187 could not be realised; there was, therefore, no fund of profit that could justify the heavy increase laid by Raja Debi Singh upon the country. Debi Singh was well acquainted with this circumstance but without any attention to the future cultivation, determined at once upon a heavy increase, and accordingly called upon the zamindars and naibs to execute kabuliyats. They all remonstrated and petitioned that the settlement might be made according to the hustabood. He would listen to nothing, but by severity, threats and confinement they were obliged to sign the papers much against their will."[8]

Another complaint of a general nature was that when the zamindars fell in arrears, they were confined in their cutcheries, their land was sold at prices infinitely and shamefully below the value, and they were turned out of possession without being allowed to collect their balances, sezawals being appointed to supersede the zamindars in the act of collection.[9] Even the khamar and other rent-free lands were not spared.

The extensive nature of the complaints is proved by the fact that of the 12 parganas forming the district of Rangpur the lands of 8 zamindaris were sold, namely, the zamindaris of Bamandanga, Fatehpur 6 annas, Fatehpur 3½ annas, Monthana, Odassey, Kundi 14¾ annas and Kazirhat and Tepa.[10] Most of the zamindars were kept confined in the cutcheries and they were debarred from making collections. Guards were placed over the female zamindars of Monthana and Tepa and severe restrictions were imposed on their movements.

Paterson testifies to the fact that the zamindars were forced

---

[8] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 20 October 1783.

[9] A petition from the zamindars of Kazirhat and another from those of the chakla of Rangpur—enclosed in Paterson's Report, ibid., 23 September 1783.

[10] Report of Rangpur Commission, dated 23 March 1786, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 464-591.

to sell their lands at a rate shamefully below their value. Even the Rangpur commission whose sole mission was to draw the curtain over the misdeeds of the farmer found it difficult to ignore the facts altogether.

About the sale of khamar lands Paterson observes that the zamindars of Rangpur for the immediate subsistence of themselves and their families held some small possession of land under the titles of khamar and pyet batta. It was a conditional appendage to a zamindari and could not be sold because it was the property of the government. But the farmer acted in violation of the law and these lands were sold away in perpetuity. From such transactions the government got no advantage, as the lands continued rent-free and the zamindar was ruined and his family reduced to starvation.[11]

The zamindars further complained that excessive severities and tortures were inflicted on them and their gomosthas to enforce payment of the heavy demands of the farmer. All sorts of compulsion were employed against the zamindari amlahs—putting them in chains, handcuffing them, beating, flogging and disgracing them. Moreover, the amlahs were kept confined under a guard of sepoys whose exactions were numerous.[12] Every form of beating and flogging was also used against the zamindars. The zamindars were put in chains, tied up to bamboos and beaten with canes and sometimes to such a degree that they fainted under the blows.[13]

The result of such wanton oppression was general desertion by the zamindars. Paterson received a series of applications from the zamindars for parwanas of protection to enable them to return to their zamindaris from which they had fled on account of oppression.[14]

From the information Paterson gathered it became clear that all the zamindars of Sicca Mahals under Debi Singh's manage-

[11] Letter from Paterson, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 20 October 1783.

[12] Petition from the zamindars of Kazirhat enclosed in Paterson's letter, ibid., 23 September 1783.

[13] Report of Rangpur Commission, *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 519-23.

[14] Letter from Paterson—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 29 December 1783.

ment left their zamindaris. The zamindars of Bolihar wandered from place to place till they took refuge in Baranagar in the house of Rani Bhawani. Jaydurga Choudhurani, zamindar of Monthana fled to Natore. Jagadiswari Choudhurani, zamindar of Bamandanga, also fled the country. Alakananda Choudhurani, zamindar of chakla of Kakina took refuge in Murshidabad. The zamindars of Kazirhat applied to Paterson through their vakils for a parwana of protection to enable them to return. Similar petitions were also received by him from the zamindars of the pargana Sheeksakar, pargana Palashbari and pargana Bobanpore.

The general desertion by the zamindars was itself an eloquent testimony to the fact that the oppression to which they were subjected was unbearable.

The Grievances of the Raiyats

It is true that the zamindars became victims of Debi Singh's oppression, but the worst sufferers in this regard were the raiyats. As the committee of revenue rightly remarked, the weight of the burden fell ultimately on the raiyats.

As the demands and exactions of the farmer increased, the zamindars passed on their burden to the raiyats. Of the many and the most varied forms of exactions which the raiyats complained of, deerinwillah and batta were the two most general ones. These two hateful taxes were at the first instance imposed upon the zamindars who in their turn collected them from the raiyats.

These two taxes figure prominently in the numerous petitions which were, long before the uprising had started, sent to Goodlad, but the collector took no notice of them.

In reply to Goodlad's parwana the raiyats of Kazirhat, Fatehpur, Kakina and Tepa stated that they had been ruined by the imposition of two articles of deerinwillah (five annas in the rupee) and batta (three annas in the rupee).[15] In reply to another parwana issued by the collector, the raiyats of Kakina, Ka-

---

[15] Statement of the raiyats in reply to Goodlad's parwana—enclosed in his letter, ibid., 24 March 1783.

zirhat, Fatehpur, Tepa, Monthana, Odassey, Bamandanga, Purabbhag, Panga, etc. presented a petition in which they demanded: (1) the abolition of deerinwillah, (2) the abolition of batta, (3) the abolition of curtanee and hundean, (4) the deduction of the ferary from the kistbandee.[16] These impositions were all the more hateful because they were unauthorised and illegal. Even more dreadful were the methods by which such illegal imposts were realised from the raiyats. Beating and flogging became a common practice. Women were raped. Houses were burnt. Crops were destroyed. The whole countryside was turned into a desert.

After he reached the spot Paterson was flooded with petitions and statements of numerous raiyats who cried for redress of the awful wrongs done to them. Even the Rangpur commission found it difficult to whitewash the acts of cruelty committed on the raiyats.

Some of the statements made by Dirjinarain to the Rangpur commission also bear out the truth behind the complaints.[17] Dirjinarain declared that one Jadunandan Sharma was appointed tokedar of taluk Kymaree in Tepa in 1188 B.S. and in Magh when he arrived, he began to beat and flog all the raiyats, patwaris and husbandmen. The following are some of his answers to the commission's questions.

Q. How did the insurrection at Rangpur happen?

A. The causes were that 4 bullocks sold for a rupee and that even another was taken by way of batta; besides the woman was seized for the rents, instead of the men, which was insufferable.

Q. Who seized the woman?

A. Raja Debi Singh's collectors.

Q. Were the bullocks seized also by force?

A. No, by sale.

Q. What other causes were there for the insurrection?

A. It is customary for raiyats, when greatly distressed, to abscond and go to other places, and that they should be en-

---

[16] Ibid.

[17] Zabanbandi of Dirjinarain, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 450-55.

couraged in such cases to return by the indulgences granted to them by the zamindars or farmers, whereas Debi Singh's officers used to bring the raiyats back by force and used them ill.

Q. Was there any other cause?

A. Lands that at the time of Debi Singh's becoming farmer and before had yielded but rupee one, he would charge two upon them.

Q. Were these exactions made by Debi Singh from the raiyats or the zamindars?

A. From the raiyats—on lands which yield, for instance, 2,000 rupees, he would oblige half the raiyats to abscond and exact 2,500 rupees from the remaining half.

As the depositions from other raiyats show, the oppressions were of the crudest kind. In a mass petition the raiyats of Kazirhat, Kakina, Fatehpur, Tepa, Monthana, Odassey, Bamandanga, Purabbhag, Panga, etc. stated:[18] "We raiyats are ruined. In our houses we have nothing left, our grain, our cattle and other effects we have sold." They complained that they had sold even their women and children. But even this was not enough. Sezawals and tahsildars were sent to the villages, who tied the raiyats to bamboos, beat them with canes, with fists and put them to every possible humiliation and even their beards were shaved off.[19] The raiyats of Kazirhat complained that troops were sent against them who put to death and hanged a number of raiyats and burnt down and plundered their houses.

Similar harrowing tales of oppression were reported by Zahoor Bosneah of the taluk of Calcapoor in the chakla of Kazirhat. Zahoor stated that he acted as the bosneah for four taluks, Calcapore, Chericola, etc. Gobindaram Majumdar, the gomostha of Gourmohan Choudhuri, placed him under a guard of five paiks, seized him and carried him to another place and extorted from him four hundred rupees in the course of four days. The same day one raiyat of Chericola fled from the rigour

---

[18] Mass petition of raiyats—enclosed in letter from Goodlad, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 24 March 1783.

[19] Raiyats' answer to Goodlad's parwana, ibid.

of extortions (he was forced to sell five cows for one rupee) and never returned. Many other raiyats of the same taluk were so flogged and beaten that their suffering could not be described. Saber Mahomed, the patwari of the above taluk, was beaten almost to death and his whiskers were torn out by the roots.[20]

The raiyats of chakla Rangpur wrote with indignation: "Never was such severity of punishment used against the renters. Never such disgraces and insults. Never had anyone been put upon a bullock and made to ride by beat of drum. Never had women been confined or brought to the cutchery and made to ride upon the necks of their husbands. Nor ever had been known such burning of villages, hanging, beheading and cutting down the corn to be given to the elephants."[21] The immediate consequence of this dreadful oppression, they observed, was an almost total desertion of the country.

Equally horrifying were the reports from Dhee Jamta in the district of Dinajpur which also formed a part of Debi Singh's farm. Sheikh Susdil complained: "Kriparam Bose was appointed sezawal. Upon his arrival he seized the patwaris and other responsible raiyats, put them in irons and confined them in the phatak or prison. They were beaten and flogged morning and evening. They were thrown upon their backs with their feet tied together and held up by a bamboo. While in this posture they were beaten upon the soles of their feet with rods with thorns on and were beaten with shoes upon the head till the blood gushed from their noses."[22]

The accounts given by the raiyats are corroborated by the naib of Dhee Jamta who added that women were also made the worst victims of oppression. The wife of Rajballav Sardar of Boda, the wife of Tipu Pramanik of Tewaree Gong, the widow of Noor Beg Mandal of Dhee Gong, the widow of

---

[20] Zabanbandi of Zahoor Bosneah—enclosed in Paterson's letter, ibid., 29 December 1783.

[21] Summary of the complaints of the zamindars and raiyats of chakla Rangpur—enclosed in Paterson's Report, ibid., 23 September 1783.

[22] Zabanbandi of Sheikh Susdil—enclosed in Paterson's letter, ibid.

Akoon, another raiyat, and many others were put in irons and were severely flogged and beaten. The wife of Sustoo, another raiyat, was confined and raped. Two unmarried daughters of Angoo Mandal, inhabitant of Calsa-Kundi, were brought and deflowered in the cutchery.[23]

The acts of oppression perpetrated by the farmer and his agents struck terror into the hearts of the inhabitants. People left their homes en masse. Dhee Jamta became destitute of inhabitants. Not a lamp was lighted there. Desolation could not be more complete.

But the raiyats who believed that by mass desertion they would save their skin became soon disillusioned. The farmer became all the more vengeful. He issued parwanas in which he gave orders to his local agents to punish the absconders in an exemplary way. They were to pull down their houses and cut down whatever crops there were in the field.[24] In another parwana the farmer assured his agents that with the sanction of the district authorities he was sending an armed force to burn down the villages of those who were acting in a deceitful manner. The agents were also informed that as for the expenses incurred on account of the sepoys and others they were to collect the amount by an assessment upon each district.[25]

The zamindars and the raiyats laid the entire blame upon the farmer Debi Singh and Collector Goodlad. But their assessment was only partly correct. They had no clear idea about the forces at work since the commencement of the company's rule. They did not fully understand that the farmer and the collector were but clogs in the wheel of the company's administration.

---

[23] Zabanbandi of Bardes Doss Abodguiree, enclosed in Paterson's letter, ibid.

[24] Parwanas under the seal of Bahadur Singh, nominal farmer of the zilla of Dinajpur to the agents and managers of taruf of Beluah in the pargana Salbaree—enclosed in Paterson's Report, ibid.

[25] Parwanas to Neelmany Buxi of the taruf Angeenah Mahomedpur and to Sheonath Roy and Raghunath Mustaphe of the taruf Catchua in the pargana of Salbaree—enclosed in Paterson's Report, ibid.

Exactions by the East India Company

Nevertheless, these complaints by the raiyats and zamindars throw much light on the revenue policy of the East India Company. The be-all and end-all of the policy of the company was reaping of maximum profit through maximum exploitation of the peasants.

Increase in Jumma

The core of the revenue policy of the company was the maximisation of revenue.

In May 1781 the settlement of the revenues of the Rangpur district was concluded with Kamaluddin Hussain as farmer under the security of Debi Singh at an increase of 70,000 narainee rupees on the jumma of the preceding year. Although the name of Kamaluddin Hussain was used in the proposal, Debi Singh was deemed the real renter and the person responsible to the government.[26] The committee of revenue were induced to enter into these engagements not only because they offered the highest revenue, but also because they did not have faith in the zamindars being able to raise the increased demand.

According to Paterson this increase in jumma was wholly unjustified. He observed: "The desertions of the raiyats because of enforced collection of this increase, the subsequent failure in the cultivation of 1189 and the necessity that Debi Singh himself felt of allowing an abatement in the jumma of that year to the amount of upwards of 2 lakhs of rupees are facts that show how little the country could bear such an increase so inconsiderately imposed."[27]

Even the Rangpur commission whose sole object was to whitewash the crimes committed by the farmer was forced to admit that "no such assessment as that laid by Debi Singh was ever levied from the country", and that the country was not in a position to bear the burden of such an increase in the jumma.[28]

---

[26] Ibid., 9 July 1783.

[27] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 20 October 1783.

[28] Report of Rangpur Commission, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, p. 470.

Abwabs

It should be borne in mind that the increase in jumma was not the only cause of complaint of the people. Over and above, a variety of obnoxious imposts brought the cup of misery to the full. Among the innumerable unauthorised taxes which the farmer forcibly realised from the raiyats, the most hateful were the two known as batta and deerinwillah.

The committee of revenue observed that the exaction of deerinwillah and batta was what the raiyats principally complained of and these constituted the principal cause of the insurrection.[29]

Debi Singh charged from the zamindars and raiyats exorbitant batta and demanded an excessive allowance for short weight. This he did in flagrant violation of the terms of his agreement.

The revenues of Rangpur were always paid in Cazana Sye narainee rupees. Debi Singh himself acknowledged it. But he did not choose to abide by this agreement and insisted upon the payments being made in French arcot rupees. By this the zamindars lost, by the difference of exchange, nearly 14 per cent and were afterwards charged with a further batta.[30]

By the accounts delivered to the Rangpur commission[31] by Debi Singh the amount deducted from the payments (for 1188) made by the zamindars was on account of :

	Rupees	*Annas*	*Gundas*	*Kousic*
Batta	72,354	5	10	3
Short Weight	24,900	9	5	0
Total	97,254	14	15	3

On how far Debi Singh was justified in making this imposition, Paterson writes in reply to a query put to him by the committee of revenue : "With respect to batta collected at the sadar or head cutchery during the years 1185, 1186 and 1187,

[29] Minutes of Council Meeting, Fort William, ibid., p. 27.

[30] Paterson's Report B, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 19 June 1783.

[31] Report of Rangpur Commission, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, p. 494.

there are no records or vouchers to be found, because it is a tax unauthorised by and unknown to government."[32] The matter was also referred to the preparer of reports who observed that the ancient narainee rupee was the standard of Sye Cazana, and not chargeable either with batta or short weight.

The Rangpur commission made a clumsy attempt at concealing Debi Singh's guilt on the plea that the district was in the thick of a currency turmoil and much of the exactions were due to a misconstruction of the orders of the government regarding species. Yet it was difficult for them to exonerate Debi Singh from all the guilt under this head. They had to reluctantly admit that certainly the charge of 24,900 rupees for short weight was very heavy and appeared to be an excess out of proportion.[33]

The imposition of deerinwillah at the rate of 2½ annas in the rupee was another universal complaint among the raiyats. Deerinwillah was an unauthorised tax. It was a general name for the increase annually imposed in the district by zamindars at the end of the year, on the plea of making up for the deductions annually allowed by them to the raiyats to encourage cultivation at the beginning of the year.[34]

---

[32] Letter from Paterson—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 20 October 1783.

[33] Report of Rangpur Commission, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 494-500.

[34] In reply to the queries made by the Rangpur commission on the nature of the above tax, the gomosthas of the zamindars of Rangpur gave the following particulars:

The raiyats at the beginning of the year complain to the zamindars on various accounts; therefore, the zamindars to satisfy the raiyats give them deductions; at this rate they pay their malguzari through the year.

At the end of the year, at the time of the jummabandi, the zamindars levy a tax on the raiyats. This tax is called deerinwillah.

If the zamindars do not attend to the complaints of the raiyats, yet collect the deerinwillah in the course of the year, as that is not the custom of the country, then the raiyats always complain.

Gomosthas of Rangpur.

—Letter to Hon'ble Board from Rangpur Commission, ibid., p. 194.

In the period under review, the tax was collected by the zamindars with the full consent of the farmer and the connivance of the collector of the district who did not raise his little finger to stop this unauthorised collection. In this case, the usual conditions were not fulfilled, encouragement was not given to the raiyats in times of cultivation, their complaints remained completely unheeded; yet the unauthorised tax of deerinwillah was collected by Debi Singh and his accomplices. This constituted the main complaint of the raiyats.

Over and above the increase in the jumma and the obligation to pay batta and deerinwillah the raiyats had to bear the burden of a number of other illegal imposts. Among such imposts, paricular mention may be made of the following : (1) rusoom, (2) hundean or interest, (3) ferary, (4) curtanee, (5) sewanee rozenamchee.

Rusoom: Under this head Debi Singh used to exact a fee over and above the jumma of 1187.[35] Debi Singh had no right to exact it as a tax from his underrenters. Yet he did it in flagrant violation of the law.[36]

Hundean and Interest: Hundean was the charge of remittance of revenue to Calcutta by bills of exchange. It was first collected from the district in the year 1188. When Debi Singh found that the revenue of Rangpur was not to be remitted to Calcutta, but to be paid to the chief at Rangpur, he relinquished his claim of hundean and made no deduction from the zamindars' payment on that account, but combined the two demands of interest and hundean and charged it from the zamindars under the head of rusoom mustagery at 2 to 8 per cent on the jumma, amounting to Rs 16,651–13–11–1.[37]

Ferary: This was the name for another unauthorised collec-

---

[35] Letter from Paterson, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 20 October 1783.

[36] Rusoom appears to be a general name for various other forms of illegal exactions. For example, we have reference to rusoom on promissory notes, zaminee rusoom, etc.—enclosure in Paterson's Report A. ibid., 19 June 1783.

[37] Report of Rangpur Commission, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 491-92.

tion made by the farmer on account of the balances of the raiyats who had fled from those that remained. About this Paterson writes: "Under the head of firany (ferary) the jumma of absentees was collected by an assessment upon those who remained in settled proportions from each ryot; the complaints against this were universal from every village."[38]

Curtanee: Curtanee was in the nature of an arbitrary deduction from the raiyats' payments. Such deductions were made under various pretexts, such as cutchery charges, charities, nazars, the farmer's travelling expenses, etc.[39] In 1188 the amount collected under this head compares very unfavourably with that in 1187:

1187 – 19,865
1188 – 37,776.

The Rangpur commission observed that the deduction made under this head was arbitrary and in the year 1188 it was carried to a great excess.[40]

Sewanee Rozenamchee: Being clandestine collections these were not entered into the rozenamchee or day book. At the latter end of 1189 the zamindars complained to Debi Singh against his agent Har Ram for baladestee or arbitrary collections, made by him in 1188, to the amount of Rs 30,689–13–8.[41]

Apart from these illegal imposts narrated above, the farmer levied for himself many other petty exactions such as chanda or subscriptions, seedah or charges on account of rice, grain and other articles of provision, salami or fees exacted under various pretexts.

Interest

If a raiyat could persuade anyone to advance him money, the rate of interest charged was 5 gundas per diem on the rupee.

Such were the numerous imposts which the farmer realised from the zamindar, who passed them on to those under him and

---

[38] Letter from Paterson, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 20 October 1783.
[39] Enclosure in Paterson's Report A, ibid., 19 June 1783.
[40] Report of Rangpur Commission, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, p. 493.
[41] Ibid., p. 487.

so on. These exactions fell ultimately upon the raiyat and the burden was increased in proportion to the number of hands it passed through.

Acts of Physical Violence

Worse still were the acts of physical violence which were shocking to all sense of justice and humanity.

Paterson himself was much moved by the unceasing flow of reports of physical violence pouring in from different quarters. He wrote: "The punishment inflicted upon the ryots both of Rangpur and Dinajpur for nonpayment were in many instances of such a nature that I would rather wish to draw a curtain over them than shock your feelings by the detail; but that however disagreeable the task may be to myself it is absolutely necessary for the sake of justice, humanity and honour of government that they should be exposed to be prevented in future."[42]

Paterson cites some of the glaring instances of physical violence practised upon the raiyats:

(1) Tying fingers together and driving wedges between the joints.

(2) Flogging with bichetti—a violent caustic and inflammatory kind of nettle.

(3) Flogging with branches of bale tree with its thorns on.

(4) Tying father and son together belly to belly and flogging them in that posture.

(5) Bastinading on the soles of the feet till the nails come off.

(6) Flogging children to extort payment from the parents.

(7) Burning down the houses of raiyats and giving their unripe corn to elephants.

(8) Exposing Hindus to loss of caste by putting them upon bullocks and asses and making them ride publicly by beat of drum.

(9) Exposing women to dishonour and loss of caste by confining them in the public cutchery, binding them and putting

---

[42] Letter from Paterson—Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 23 September 1783.

fetters on them, flogging them, stripping them stark naked, putting the nipples of their breasts between cleft bamboos and tying them down and in some instances applying a lighted torch to their private parts.[43]

As a matter of fact, the range of cruelties actually practised was much wider than what had been indicated in Paterson's report. The most ingenious forms of physical violence were designed by the farmer and his agents who were but monsters in human shape. It was nothing short of a reign of terror, which Debi Singh had set up in Rangpur.

Immediate Cause

But even terror has a limit beyond which it does not work. By the fire-and-sword policy which he employed, the farmer could fulfil his engagements for the year 1187 (the first year of his lease). But even the immediate effects of that policy were so ruinous that soon enough in the following year it recoiled upon its authors.

In 1188 there was a steep fall in the price of every article occasioned by an extraordinary plenty and a stagnation of the export trade of the district.[44] Grain was offered for sale at 10 maunds for a rupee and there was no one to purchase it. Tobacco trade which in former years was extensive was totally at a standstill. It appears that the very rigour used in enforcing the collections contributed towards the fall in prices.

All these circumstances taken together made the burden of the extraordinary demands of the farmer too much for the raiyat to bear, and the rigour and severity to enforce payment rose in proportion to his inability to pay.

Paterson writes: "The rigour and cruelty with which the collections were enforced allowed the ryots no interval or leisure to turn the produce of their lands into money."

The property of the raiyats was seized and exposed to sale for less than half its value. These sales of the raiyats' effects

---

[43] Ibid.

[44] Paterson's Report A. ibid., 19 June 1783.

reduced the price of everything to such a degree that the sale-proceeds did not meet the exorbitant demands against them.

The consequence of these proceedings was en masse desertion of the raiyats and a general decrease of cultivation in the following year, for lands of those raiyats who had fled the country lay waste and the raiyats who remained having been stripped of their property were not able to cultivate the same quantity of land as before.[45]

The district was in so ruinous a condition that even Har Ram who had acted as the main agent of Debi Singh in 1188 gave up his charge of the district in 1189 and for this act of disobedience he was promptly put under confinement. Upon this Debi Singh appointed Surajnarain as collector and directed him to make the settlement. From a report of the state of the district from Surajnarain, Debi Singh became convinced that the collection of revenue at the rate charged in 1188 was well-nigh impossible.[46] In these circumstances he had recourse to trickery. He made an apparent deduction from the increase in the jumma of 1188, but promptly instituted new abwabs to make up the deficiency caused by such deduction. Surajnarain proposed to the zamindars that as they had received great deductions they should in their turn make up for the deductions so made. The result was a "voluntary" contribution from the zamindars in the form of a new imposition known as mehmany.[47] Similar other tricks were employed to take in what had been given away in the form of deductions.

Thus over and above the abwabs of the preceding year new abwabs were added. Sezawals were sent into the mofussil to make the collections and they exercised unheard-of severities upon the raiyats.

The raiyats driven to desperation at last broke out into open revolt.

---

[45] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 23 September 1783.

[46] Minutes of Council Meeting, Fort William, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, p. 21.

[47] Report of Rangpur Commission, ibid., p. 550.

Chapter IV

The English East India Company and the Uprising of 1783

The English East India Company was directly connected with that long chain of events that finally culminated in the revolt of 1783. In vain do the imperialist historians try to whitewash the misdeeds of the company. In vain do they try to shift the blame on the dirty "natives", Debi Singh and his accomplices.

The Role of Debi Singh

Debi Singh was nothing but a clog in the wheel of the company's machinery and for every misdeed perpetrated by him the company's administration must in the last analysis be held responsible.

Debi Singh was just that sort of person who felt no qualms of conscience to sell the interests of his countrymen to foreign adventurers for a mess of pottage. He was just that sort of person whom an alien government needed to use as an instrument to further their own ends. Debi Singh was an old hand in revenue matters. As is evident from some of his representations to the Governor-General's council, he was employed in the service of the English East India Company "near five and twenty years".[1] He rendered very valuable service to Lord

[1] *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 426-28.

Clive at the battle of Plassey.[2] During the famine of 1770, when he was the dewan of the district of Purnea, he imposed a heavy increase of rent on the raiyats in total disregard of the pattas. He also took away under the name of the zat the crop of the raiyats at a price lower than the prevailing market rate. The raiyats complained that the violence and oppression let loose upon them was unbearable and said that oppression added to famine made things very dreadful indeed.[3] But the complaint preferred by the raiyats was rejected as frivolous and a good character certificate was issued in favour of Debi Singh by Ducarel who was then the head of the district.[4] Ducarel did not fail to draw the attention of the authorities to the fact that Debi Singh had been of much service to the company in his career as a revenue collector.

From Debi Singh's statement it is clear that for twelve years he acted as the dewan of the provinces of Rajmahal and Purnea, and in that capacity he realised sixteen lakhs of rupees per annum and he did not forget to add that at "the present juncture the same provinces do not yield ten lakhs to the government". He had afterwards for eight years held the post of the dewan to the provincial council of Murshidabad.[5]

In consideration of his past record Debi Singh was appointed again the security and dewan of the provinces of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Goraghat in the Bengali year 1188. So far as the East India Company was concerned, Debi Singh was a man of their choice. As Debi Singh himself stated in one of his petitions: "This appointment I did not solicit or wish, and in accepting it I conformed entirely to the pleasure of the Hon'ble Governor-General, Mr Hastings and of Mr Anderson,

---

[2] *A Short History of Nashipur Raj*, published by the Raja Bahadur of Nashipur, pp. 1-2.

[3] Representation of the raiyats of the pargana of Durrampoor, Havily Purnea, Serepoor, Sultanpoor, Surjahpoor, Ashja, Barrore and Tajepoor in the district of Tajepoor Purnea, Proceedings of Committee of Circuit (Purnea), 2 February 1773.

[4] Letter from Ducarel, ibid.

[5] A representation from Debi Singh, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 426-28.

the President of the Committee of Revenue."[6]

Immediately after his appointment Debi Singh, true to his old record, had recourse to fire-and-sword method to realise the increase in the revenue which was the most significant term in the agreement with the East India Company. In November 1781, the zamindar of Ghoraghat became so much harassed by the exactions of Debi Singh's sezawal that he became desperate and rose in revolt against the farmer. Goodlad, the collector of Rangpur, threw in his entire weight on the side of Debi Singh, and sent to his assistance a large party of sepoys who brought the zamindar of Ghoraghat to submission. Further, on the intervention of Goodlad the committee of revenue sent a parwana to the zamindar of Ghoraghat reprehending his conduct.[7]

To take another instance, as early as in January 1782, Charles Grant brought to the notice of Goodlad a case of severe oppression perpetrated by Debi Singh's agents on the weavers of Mahinagar, Maldah. He learnt from the united voice of all the factory gomosthas in the pargana of Mahinagar that the country was desolate and that the greater part of the weavers having abandoned their homes were skulking in the other zamindaris in the jungles. He himself saw that the head weavers had been kept in the prison of the farmer's cutchery in inhuman conditions. An ijaradar of the pargana had been so badly beaten in the presence of Debi Singh's dewan that he died soon after. But Goodlad attached no importance to the reports and did not take any steps to stop these acts of cruelty.[8]

Again we learn that in June 1782 some raiyats of Dinajpur went down to Calcutta and submitted a petition to the president of the committee of revenue on behalf of all the raiyats of Dinajpur complaining against the oppressive conduct of Debi Singh. Goodlad again came out in defence of the farmer and

---

[6] Ibid., p. 426.

[7] Letter from the Collector of Rangpur, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 14 November 1781.

[8] Letter from Charles Grant to Goodlad, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 336-46.

described these complaints as "frivolous" and "fabricated".[9]

Thus Goodlad acted as a shield for Debi Singh. He made it clear that the interests of the East India Company were intimately linked with those of the farmer; if the farmer was ruined the revenue of the company would fall.[10]

It is not surprising, therefore, that when the revolt actually broke out in Rangpur, Goodlad tried his best to shift the entire blame upon the raiyats. In defence of the farmer he declared that "the conduct of the farmer during the first year and the punctuality with which he discharged his engagements under a variety of embarrassments arising from the opposition made to his authority from the day he took charge gave me every reason to be satisfied with him."[11] He refused to believe that Debi Singh by his actions had ruined the country or that the uprising was the result of oppression. To quote his own words: "That the insurrection was occasioned by oppression I can never agree to (as I know the contrary)."[12] What is more, Goodlad supported Debi Singh who produced forged documents to prove that the uprising was the work of certain ill-disposed men in the service of the zamindars.

The Role of Goodlad

At the initial stage when the revolt started Goodlad and Debi Singh acted in close cooperation. Goodlad complied with the request of Debi Singh and sent a body of barkandazes to quell the rebellion. Debi Singh took shelter under the name of the collector and suggested measures to force the raiyats into submission. He sent parwanas to his mofussil agents assuring them that if the raiyats evaded payment they by the orders of the collector were empowered to burn down their houses and cut down their crops in the fields and destroy them.[13]

---

[9] Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 17 June 1782.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Letter from Goodlad, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 207-18.

[12] Letter from Goodlad, ibid., pp. 400-10.

[13] Letter from Paterson to Committee of Revenue, with enclosures of translation of parwanas under the seal of Bahadur Singh, nominal

The complicity of Goodlad in the crimes of Debi Singh was so obvious that Paterson who was deputed to Rangpur to investigate into the causes of the uprising was forced to draw up a long list of charges implicating him in the criminality of the conduct attributed to Debi Singh.[14] About Goodlad Paterson observes that an extensive district was under his charge, over which he presided as collector of the revenues, as civil judge and as criminal magistrate; but he did not pay proper attention to the complaints of the raiyats and grant them the redress they were entitled to.

Paterson, however, did not sufficiently take into account the fact that just as Goodlad could plead that he supported the authority of Debi Singh till the last because that was the only way he could hope to realise the company's revenues, similarly the committee of revenue was likely to extend their support to Goodlad, because whatever he did he did for safeguarding the interests of the company's government, and the realisation of the maximum revenue was the be-all and end-all of the company's administration.

As a matter of fact, all the charges brought by Paterson against Goodlad were dismissed by the highest authorities. Macpherson, a member of the governor-general's council thought Goodlad's defence upon each and all the charges strong in his favour. Governor-General Warren Hastings in his minutes wrote: "I entirely acquit Mr Goodlad of all the charges."[15] Finally, the supreme council acquitted Goodlad of all the charges and recommended that he would be again employed whenever the board found a proper opportunity for availing themselves of his services.[16]

The protection thus granted to Goodlad by both the com-

---

farmer of the zillah of Dinajpur, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 23 September 1783.

[14] Charges against Goodlad and his reply are enclosed in letter from Goodlad to Hon'ble Board; also letter from Paterson to Governor-General-in-Council, both reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 207-18, 261-80.

[15] Ibid., pp. 218-19.

[16] Ibid., pp. 448-50.

mittee of revenue and the revenue board of the governor-general-in-council was, by implication, protection given to Debi Singh, for Goodlad, it has been seen, was but an accomplice of the former in all misdeeds.

Paterson's Inquiry into the Causes of Uprising

The attitude of the committee of revenue to the Paterson commission reveals beyond doubt that it had no intentions to institute a thorough investigation into the causes of the uprising.

Strange it might seem that when Paterson was deputed to Rangpur, he was advised by the committee of revenue to give assistance to the farmer's authority, in recovering "such demands as may be justly due from his undertenants".[17]

When Paterson proceeded to investigate the causes of the uprising, Goodlad who sought to shift the blame for the revolt from the shoulders of Debi Singh to those of Kazirhat zamindars made the work of investigation difficult for Paterson by putting obstacles in his way.

Being on the spot, Paterson, however, had little difficulty in understanding the root causes of the uprising. He found himself surrounded by thousands crying for redress. The facts that he noticed constituted the most effective evidence against Debi Singh. In order to substantiate his statement he took down complaints of the raiyats that approached him and in support of these complaints he took mutchlekas or penal bonds from groups of complainants.

But the reports which Paterson sent to the committee of revenue failed to receive their appreciation. According to them the information supplied by Paterson was "defective and incomplete". They rejected the entire evidence he collected from Dinajpur as "extraneous" to the subject of his investigation. The judgment which Paterson pronounced on the villainy of Debi Singh was considered to be "premature".[18]

---

[17] Letter from Paterson, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 31 March 1783.

[18] Remarks of Mr Shore, ibid., 6 October 1783.

The fact of the matter is that the main findings of Paterson were not to the liking of the committee of revenue. With Paterson the oppressions of Debi Singh outweighed the guilt of the raiyats, who were driven to desperation. With the committee the criminality of the acts of the raiyats outweighed the oppressions committed by Debi Singh. These two viewpoints were diametrically opposite, and hence a clash between Paterson and the committee was inevitable. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the findings of Paterson were unacceptable to the committee. On the pretext that "more information and more determinate legal proofs than yet before us are necessary", they set aside the reports of Paterson and appointed a new commission (hereafter called Rangpur commission) "to proceed with and complete this investigation".[19]

The virtual rejection of the findings of Paterson by the committee coincided best with the interests of Debi Singh. It was in effect the vindication of the charges brought by Debi Singh against Paterson whom he accused of partiality to and complicity with the zamindars. Paterson rightly said that an attack upon him was to the best advantage of Debi Singh, who wanted "to divert the attention of the government from the proper object, his own crimes".[20]

The proceedings of the Paterson commission were thus scrapped. The Rangpur commission was set up to carry on the investigation once again.

The Findings of the Rangpur Commission

The entire proceedings of Rangpur commission are tainted with signs of open partiality to Debi Singh and his protector Goodlad.

This brought them into a bitter controversy with Paterson, who accused the commissioners of violating the instructions of the board of revenue which directed Debi Singh to be treated as a state prisoner. He complained that Debi Singh was attended

---

[19] Draft of Instructions to the Rangpur Commission, reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, pp. 69-82.

[20] Letter from Paterson, ibid., pp. 129-37.

by a suite of chabdars, sootaburdars, chounyburdars and cherry-burdars allowed by government only as symbols of authority to give consequence and distinction to high rank and dignity of station and, therefore, incompatible with the predicament in which he stood as a prisoner. Paterson further continued: "The sepahis who are his guards do not attend him with fixed bayonets as they ought to do; he is permitted to have a chair and sits at the same table with his judges."[21]

The board of revenue referred these complaints of Paterson to the Rangpur commissioners, who admitted in substance all the charges that were brought against them.

The commissioners admitted that on his arrival at Rangpur (Debi Singh was brought down from Calcutta where he was placed under guard) they gave him permission to remain at Meerganj, where he had a garden house, three days to recover himself from the fatigue of his journey.

They also admitted that on the day of Debi Singh's arrival, he came to Pote's house (Pote was one of the commissioners) and embraced him and Douglas and sat at the same table with them.[22]

They further admitted that as Debi Singh was approaching the cutchery they observed that the sepoys, who were placed over him as guard, were running before his palanquin without arms, as orderly sepoys. On Debi Singh's entering the cutchery, no guard attended his person nor did the havildar make his report or deliver him over to them as under confinement, or in any form.

The commissioners concluded: "We think it incumbent on us to mention this circumstance, because we conceive it to have been the intention of the hon'ble board that the Raja (Debi Singh) should appear on his arrival in the district under confinement; but either by collusion, neglect or the havildar's ignorance of his own duty the intention of the board in that respect was defeated."[23]

---

[21] Letter from Paterson, ibid., pp. 185-90.
[22] Letter from Rangpur Commissioners, ibid., pp. 192-96.
[23] Ibid., pp. 203-4.

The admissions are so clear that no further comment is needed. The queerest logic adduced by the commissioners in support of their own leniency was that since the whole district to a man was interested in his condemnation, Debi Singh who was not a convict but a defendant in confinement deserved "a sort of fair treatment" from them![24]

On 23 March 1786, the Rangpur commission submitted its report to the supreme council.[25] The report consisted of several parts. The first part dealt with the charges brought against Goodlad by Paterson. The commissioners exonerated Goodlad of almost all the charges brought against him. Next it dealt with the charges levelled against Debi Singh. This is a laboured attempt to whitewash the misdeeds perpetrated by the farmer. The commissioners made an ingenious effort to shift the blame of Debi Singh on the shoulders of the zamindars, and when that was not possible, on the shoulders of Debi Singh's agents, particularly on Har Ram.[26]

The commissioners shamelessly admit that the worst acts of oppression on the zamindars and the raiyats (e.g. confinement, being put in irons or of being beaten with a ratton, etc.) were practised, but in the same breath they do not hesitate to state that it was "the usual mode of collecting the balance throughout Bengal"[27] and that in Rangpur it does not appear that the beating of the zamindars to make them pay their revenue was ever "carried to any excess or degree of severity".[28]

The report is punctuated with vituperations on the character

---

[24] Ibid.

[25] The full report of the Rangpur commission is reprinted in *Maharaja Deby Sinha*. The report is divided into four parts—the first part disposes of the charges levelled by Paterson against Goodlad (pp. 358-81), the second deals with the charges levelled against Debi Singh (pp. 464-563), the third deals with the cruelties perpetrated by Debi Singh on the zamindars and raiyats (pp. 563-77), and the last is a narrative of the causes of the insurrection (pp. 577-91).

[26] That the report was printed verbatim by Debi Singh at his own expense and circulated privately is itself an eloquent commentary on the fact that the findings were largely what Debi Singh himself desired.

[27] Report of Rangpur Commission, *Maharaja Deby Sinha*, p. 520.

[28] Ibid., p. 558.

of the natives.[29] Plainly enough, in going to put the "natives" in the wrong, the authors of the report indulged in the worst form of racialism with which the English East India Company and its entire hierarchy of officers was tainted from top to bottom.

The Rangpur commission had served its purpose. It nullified the recommendations of the Paterson commission which indicated as clearly as possible that the misdeeds of the farmer and not those of the raiyats were at the root of the revolt. But such a generalisation appeared to the company's officers to have a dangerous implication. If Debi Singh was the main culprit, then Goodlad must have his own share because he acted as his close collaborator. And Goodlad could well declare that whatever he did he did in the interests of the East India Company and he acted within the limits approved and prescribed by the immediate higher authorities in Calcutta. The committee of revenue could also argue that each and every action of theirs had the approval of the highest authority, the revenue board of the governor-general. And who did not know that Debi Singh was the protege of no less a person than the governor-general Warren Hastings himself?[30]

The Rangpur commission was actually appointed by the appropriate authorities to set the record right. It is not surprising, therefore, that they made Paterson rather than Debi Singh the main target of their attack. They started from the premise

---

[29] The composition of the Rangpur commission shows that it could not be relied upon as an impartial body. Pote who was a member of the commission was himself a purchaser of taluks in the same area. Dirjinarain brought against him charges of bribery by Debi Singh, ibid., pp. 248-49, 519.

[30] In his speech on the impeachment of Hastings, Burke alleged that the governor-general had taken bribes from Debi Singh. Burke declared: "There was not a man in Bengal, perhaps not upon earth, a match for this Debi Singh. He was not an unknown subject, not one rashly taken up as an experiment. He was a tried man, and if there had been one more desperately and abandonedly corrupt, more wildly and flagitiously oppressive to be found unemployed in India, large as his offers were, Mr Hastings would not have taken this money from Debi Singh."

that Paterson was prejudiced against Debi Singh from the very beginning. In the name of "impartial justice", the commissioners first absolved Goodlad of all the charges that were brought against him by Paterson. This largely helped Debi Singh whose closest collaborator in the worst acts of cruelty was none other than Goodlad himself. The stage was thus set for toning down the evil deeds of Debi Singh and where the facts against him were so incriminating the charge was laid on the shoulders of the agents who acted under his instructions.

In the whole process the recommendations of the Paterson commission were rendered nugatory and Paterson himself was held up to contempt and ridicule.

The case of Paterson was indeed a tragic one. During the course of the investigations in Rangpur it became clear that he was never guided by considerations of philanthropy. His only concern was to restore the prestige of the government which had sunk very low. Paterson sought to prove that the misdeeds of the farmer had brought the company's government into disrepute. To quote his words, Debi Singh's "conduct appeared to have rendered so many thousands unhappy and which seemed calculated to throw an odium upon the system and administration of government".[31]

It is in this light that he wanted to prevail upon the authorities in Calcutta to attach importance to the investigation into the causes of the uprising. He seemed to believe that if the misdeeds of Debi Singh could be nailed down and condemned, the prestige of the company's government would be rehabilitated in the eyes of the people. So he wrote to them: "Gentlemen, as the matter now before you is the cause of a whole people, the importance of it ought to command your strictest attention. The consequence of your decision will be felt by millions" and "must necessarily and materially affect the whole body of natives and inhabitants of these provinces".[32]

Paterson failed to understand that the misdeeds of the farmer

---

[31] Letter from Paterson, Proceedings of Committee of Revenue, 23 September 1783.

[32] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 29 December 1783.

were not unconnected with the system of the company's government. In actual practice, the conception of "natural rights"[33] of the raiyats, which Paterson speaks of, did not have any weight whatsoever in the consideration of the company's administrators. Such fine distinctions in the outlook of the company's administrators and that of the farmer did not at all correspond to reality. The fact of the matter was that the company's rule was so involved in the farmer's misdeeds that any wholesale condemnation of Debi Singh would only end in an ultimate censure of their own actions.

Actually, Paterson made a fool of himself when he sought to draw a distinction between the sense of justice shown by the company and the callous indifference of a "native" to his own countrymen. He had to pay very dearly indeed. According to his own repeated complaint he was subjected to dishonour and humiliation throughout the long course of the trial.

So the die was cast. The findings of the Paterson commission were thrown into the dustbin. The Rangpur commission set a new tone and gave a new direction which was in conformity with the wishes of the company's government. In February 1789, in the time of Lord Cornwallis, the final orders of government were passed. Debi Singh got off scot-free, with the exception of the loss of his money. Har Ram, a native of Rangpur who had been the subfarmer under him, was singled out and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment, and after that to be banished from the districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur.[34]

To understand fully the line of their argument which led them to apportion the blame less on Debi Singh and more on Har Ram, we may quote the following from the text of the statement: "Although much of the criminality, alleged against Deby Singh, is not substantiated by the investigation of the commissioners, his conduct is by no means innocent, admitting even a distinction between his own acts and his responsibility for the conduct of Har Ram. To assign to him the culpability of every specific act of cruelty, exercised by Har Ram under

[33] Letter from Paterson, ibid., 23 September 1783.

[34] E. G. Glazier, *A Report on the District of Rungpore* (1873), Part III.

the circumstances of the evidence before us, would in our opinion be unjust... With respect to Har Ram, the proofs are specific, and he, as the most culpable, merits the greatest punishment."[35]

To Har Ram was thus assigned the role of the proverbial whipping boy.

Dirjinarain, Kena and three other top leaders of the rebels were released from confinement but were required to leave the districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur and never to reside in them under the penalty of being apprehended and committed to jail.[36]

Thus Debi Singh, the real culprit, the chief hangman of the peasants, was let off without any punishment. This could not have been otherwise. Because Debi Singh was just the person who was selected by the committee of revenue with the full approval of Warren Hastings, the governor-general, to act as the farmer of the company's revenues for the simple reason that he consented to take the farm at a considerable increase of revenue. This increase of revenue was the real secret, the chief connecting link that bound all of them together, the farmer Debi Singh, Collector Goodlad, the committee of revenue, the revenue department and above all the governor-general. It was really a chain of oppression. One end of the chain was held by the company's officers, and the other, by the farmer and his agents. The responsibility for the revolt of 1783 must therefore be laid squarely upon the shoulders of the East India Company.

---

[35] Letter from the governor-general-in-council to John Shore, President, and members, Board of Revenue, Proceedings of Board of Revenue, Fort William, 13 January 1789.

[36] Ibid.

Chapter V

The Historical Significance of the Peasant Uprising of 1783

The peasant uprising of 1783 ruthlessly exposed the evils inherent in the colonial system of exploitation. It brought into focus the basic feature of colonial oppression: the superimposition of an alien rule subverting thereby the law of independent social development of the oppressed nation. The worst victim of this process were the peasants who formed the mass of the oppressed nation. The uprising brought into bold relief the working of the main agencies of colonial rule—the shareholders of the East India Company living in England, their European officers in India, and a race of their native hirelings, banians, gomosthas and others, all forming links in the same chain.

In the first period of its existence, colonialism unveiled its ugly face in a shameless manner. It was an age of English "merchant adventurers" working hand in glove with unscrupulous Indian agents to gain immediate and maximum profits at the cost of the helpless millions of the Indian people.

It was not accidental, therefore, that the history of the revenue administration of the East India Company in its formative years (1757 to 1793) was the history of a long series of experiments in the farming system. The annual farming, the amildari system, the five-year settlement—the farming system in all its variations was equally productive of the most destructive effects upon the people and the country.

Contemporary Critics of the Farming System

Such a destructive system could not but evoke criticism in its own day. Some of the critics did not fail to notice that the revenue experiments of the East India Company compared very unfavourably with the revenue arrangements of the Mughal empire even in the period of its decline.

Alexander Dow sharply attacked the first farming experiments of the East India Company. Writing about the wasteful experiments of the early years of the company's rule, Dow observed that the decline of Bengal did not commence from the time of the nawabs, "for it was not then the maxim to take away the honey by destroying the swarm". On the contrary he stated, "We may date the commencement of the decline from the day on which Bengal fell under the domination of the foreigners; who were more anxious to improve the present moment to their own emolument, than, by providing against waste, to secure a permanent advantage to the British nation."[1]

He gives a vivid account of the ruin of rural Bengal. He takes care to note the tyranny of the revenue collectors such as "the gomastas, or agents, dellols, pikes, pikars, burkandaz, and other vermin". He particularly mentions, "the ruinous policy of farming out the lands annually... The farmers having no certainty of holding lands beyond the year, made no improvements. Their profit must be immediate, to satisfy the hand of avarice, which was suspended over their heads. Impressed with the uncertainty of their situation, they raised the rents, to the last farthing, on the wretched tenants; who unwilling to forsake their ancient habitations and household gods, submitted to impositions which they could not pay."[2]

But the remedy that Dow suggests was not, however, the end of "the dominion of foreigners" which he characterises as the startingpoint of Bengal's decline. On the contrary, he recommneded measures leading to its further consolidation. In

---

[1] Quoted in *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, Ranjit Guha, pp. 31-32, from Alexander Dow, *History of Hindostan*, Vol. III.

[2] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

order to secure the "permanence of dominion" he proposed that speculative revenue farming should be replaced by a more refined form of exploitation based on the security of private property. He observes: "Men of speculation may suppose that the security of property to the natives might infuse a spirit of freedom, dangerous to our power, into our Indian subjects... To give them property would only bind them with stronger ties to our interest: and make them more our subjects; or, if the British nation prefers the name—more our slaves."[3]

Henry Pattullo who included Bengal in the field of his studies also levelled a severe attack against the agrarian policies of the East India Company. He spoke about the misery of the people "which to the reproach of Britain, has been too much the case in Bengal, ever since the British arms made the conquest".[4] He compares the lot of the subjects of the East India Company with those of the Roman empire and reminds us about "the fate of some of the Roman provinces, which were abandoned, at a distance, to the direction of generals, governors and praetors, whose rapacity robbed these provinces of their wealth and circulation", and concludes that "the case, it is too true, has hitherto been precisely parallel in Bengal, or worse".[5]

Like Dow he also considers the system of annual farming as the main source of the evil. He writes: "The great oppressions which are practised there with the imprudent way of letting the lands annually have already had their natural effect, in laying many of the cultivated lands so soon waste and desolate; that the residing labourers have abandoned them, and that there is now a necessity of letting them much under their value to vagrants..."[6] He recalls "the like measures have had the like effects in many of the interior provinces of France, where all the former residentary farmers have been ruined, and none can now be found in these parts, but such as present themselves with no other funds than scarcely clothes to cover them... Such, and worse if possible, will soon be the infallible consequences,

---

[3] Ibid., p. 38.
[4] Remarks of Henry Pattullo, ibid., p. 47 (quoted).
[5] Ibid., p. 46.
[6] Ibid., pp. 47-48.

over all the provinces of Bengal, of the present destructive measures."

It is interesting to note that like Dow, Pattullo also does not recommend the elimination of foreign rule but its further consolidation based on a settlement of the lands in perpetuity.

The severest criticism of the farming system comes from the pen of Philip Francis. It is well known that the main target of Francis's attack was the new farming system introduced by Warren Hastings. He did not, however, fail to condemn the abuses of the earlier period. He took care to declare that it was "not any part of his design to defend the practice of the last twenty years. I consider it as a period of violence without system, in which the ancient regulations of the country have been annihilated, and no others that deserve the name of system substituted in the room of them."[7] He continues: "The country has been racked for twenty years by assessments formed on conjectural valuations, when their object was to extort the greatest possible revenue."

Five years of this period (1772-77) belonged to Warren Hastings and Francis concentrated his attack mainly on that period. He singles out Hastings's plan for a five-year settlement and condemns it in the most severe terms. He observes: "A plan more ruinous to the country, more likely to deceive the company, or to disappoint the expectations of this government than that which was formed by the committee of circuit could not have been adopted."[8]

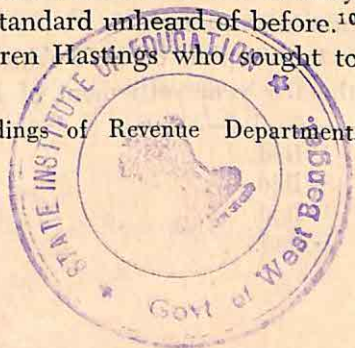
Francis asserts that "the assessment fixed by the Mogul government on these provinces was light and moderate in comparison with ours".[9] Describing the impact of the British conquest on the Indian situation, he states that the face of the country had been "altered for the worse", the land tax of the country had been raised or continued at a standard unheard of before.[10]

Rebutting the arguments of Warren Hastings who sought to

[7] Minutes of Philip Francis, Proceedings of Revenue Department, 21 February 1777.

[8] Ibid., 1 May 1776.

[9] Ibid., 5 November 1776.

[10] Ibid., 21 February 1777.

justify the high rates of assessment, Francis observes: "But if he admits some truths, which I deem to be indisputable; that, in consequence of wars, revolutions, inundation, famine, continual variations in the mode of collecting the revenue, continual usurpation of the rights of the people, and the introduction of a foreign domination, the face of the country is totally changed; that the land is depopulated; that manufactures are dabased, and the specie extracted on one side, without a return on any other."[11]

Quoting chapter and verse from Adam Smith, Montesquieu and J. Stuart, Francis concentrates his attack on the new farming system and observes: "That under the direct management of government, whether by farmers or agents, the lands must fall to decay; that, if the farming system were not, as I deem it, an arbitrary violation of right in the first instance, it ought to be renounced on every rational principle of economy, as immediately ruinous to the country, and ultimately to that government which has a great and lasting interest in its prosperity."[12]

Philip Francis warns that "continual usurpations on the rights of the people" have fixed in their minds a rooted distrust of government "which is being considered by every rank of its subjects as their common enemy".[13] He refutes the arguments of Warren Hastings that whatever the oppression it will not produce discontent in the people; he states that as the people of Bengal are oppressed, the oppressed will undoubtedly be discontented and more so as "an oppressed people have nothing to fear from a revolution".[14]

But the remedy which Francis proposed was not in any way the elimination of foreign domination which was the main source of all the evils but rather the strengthening of foreign rule over India through an alternative system of revenue administration.

In his plan of 1776 which was considered an alternative to the five-year settlement of Hastings he made it clear that the

---

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

basic objective of his policy was to ensure "permanence and duration" of the English power in India. According to him, the plan of Warren Hastings was short-sighted; it was dominated by immediate and temporary advantages. He argues: the "security of a permanent possession" was, on the contrary, the underlying idea of his plan which took into account the far-reaching and long-standing interests of the company.

Emphasising the main point of difference between the two plans Francis wrote: "Opposing views of moderate but permanent profit to those which offer immediate and excessive returns, I am not likely to be a favourite with men who consider nothing but the utmost emoluments of a temporary possession. This is the true line of distinction between all Mr Hastings's measures and mine."[15] He, however, appealed to the good sense of the superior authorities and wanted them to consider "whether the real interests of the East India Company, as a permanent body, are best consulted by a system, which looks only to temporary profits, immediate and excessive, or by another, founded in moderation and aiming at permanence."[16]

The keynote of the alternative plan of Philip Francis was the principle of inviolability of the rights of private property. His opposition to the plan of Warren Hastings was rooted in the idea that it "annihilated every idea of private property..." He was convinced that "without private property there can be no public revenue, I mean that regular and permanent revenue, on which alone a wise government ought to place its dependence."[17]

The main charge that Philip Francis brought against Warren Hastings was that he had helped in "destroying the intermediate orders of men" who stood between the government and the raiyat. He believed that the zamindars were the rightful owners and Warren Hastings had wrongfully dispossessed them of their lands. This he described as "an invasion of the rights of pro-

---

[15] Quoted by Ranajit Guha, op. cit., p. 93.

[16] Minutes of Philip Francis, Proceedings of Revenue Department, 21 February 1777.

[17] Quoted by Ranajit Guha, op. cit., p. 98.

perty". He declares that the measures of Warren Hastings had resulted in "a violent and arbitrary reduction of some thousands of noblemen, gentlemen and freeholders (for such ranks there were in Bengal as well as in England) to a competent subsistence, that is to the level of the peasantry."[18] In order to give expression to the vehemence of his feelings he comments: "If, for example, it were directly proposed to annihilate that rank of men in whom the inheritance and property of the lands of Bengal are rested, in order to transfer to the ruling power the produce of their estates leaving nothing to the owners but a competent subsistence, it is to be presumed that every man in Britain would revolt at a proposition, so full of palpable cruelty and injustice."[19]

Starting from the principle of inviolability of private property, Philip Francis proposes an alternative system in which the real proprietorship would be left in the hands of the native. "Without a fixed jumma", he affirms, "no other measures whatever can save the country, a conquered province."[20] Philip Francis was so much blinded by his dogmatic defence of private property that he did not care to know whether the real proprietorship was vested in zamindars and whether the zamindars were not the worst oppressors of their raiyats. Proceeding from the false premise that zamindars were the real proprietors he denied any claim of the raiyats to the rights of ownership. He categorically stated that the raiyat was not the proprietor of the land—"it is not even necessary that he should be so, either for his benefit or that of government. The scheme of regular government requires that the mass of the people should labour, and that the few should be supported by the labours of the many who receive their retribution in the peace, protection and security."[21] He believed that the zamindars and raiyats if they were left to themselves would soon come to "an agreement in which each party will find his advantage". In other words, he proposed that

[18] Minutes of Philip Francis, Proceedings of Revenue Department, 21 February 1777.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 5 November 1776.

[21] Ibid.

the raiyats should be left completely to the mercy of the zamindars.

Such was then the essence of the alternative plan of Philip Francis. He wanted the foreign government to consolidate its position by entering into an unholy combination with the native feudal elements, and with their support to intensify the exploitation of the peasants who formed the bulk of the population of the country.

Thus the demand for the abolition of the farming system which featured so prominently in the writings of these critics did not at all mean a case for the abolition of the basis of colonial exploitation. What these critics proposed was that the farming system should be ended to make room for some sort of a permanent settlement with the zamindars. In reality, however, the farming system and the permanent settlement symbolised two forms of exploitation equally associated with British colonialism. The former was associated with the destructive methods of the period of merchant capital, the latter cleared the ground for a more systematic exploitation characteristic of the period of industrial capitalism.

Marx on the Role of the East India Company

In the period preceding the introduction of the permanent settlement, the colonial rule in India was carried on by the East India Company, which represented "the merchant adventurers" of England. These merchant adventurers made looting and plunder a part of their system. This work of spoliation of India's teeming millions became a main source of the primary accumulation of world capital (alongside the expropriation of the peasantry within Britain).

The classic description of the sources of the primary accumulation of capital, characteristic of the period of merchant capitalism, comes from the pen of Karl Marx. He writes[22] that "the methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic", they are "written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood

---

[22] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I. Moscow, pp. 714-15.

and fire". In this connection he particularly stressed the role of the colonial system and observes: "The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins signalised the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation."[23]

"The colonial system ripened, like a hot-house, trade and navigation... The colonies secured a market for the budding manufactures, and, through the monopoly of the market, an increased accumulation. The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement, and murder, floated back to the mother-country and were there turned into capital."[24]

Marx describes the colonial system as an embodiment of "brute force".[25] Mentioning India in particular, he said that, under the colonial rule, that "rich and well-populated" country was "given over to plunder".[26] He gives a vivid description of how India's trade became a monopoly of the higher employees of the East India Company. "The employees themselves", he writes, "fixed the price and plundered at will the unhappy Hindus. The Governor-General took part in this private traffic. His favourites received contracts under conditions whereby they, cleverer than the alchemists, made gold out of nothing. Great fortunes sprang up like mushrooms in a day; primitive accumulation went on without the advance of a shilling."[27]

The long series of land revenue experiments during the early years of the company's rule were also undertaken with the same object—to drain out India's resources to the last dregs. Referring to the fact of the acquisition of dewani in 1765, Marx writes: "The East India Company thereby acquired absolute government over 25 million people, and an annual revenue of

[23] Ibid., p. 751.
[24] Ibid., pp. 753-54.
[25] Ibid., p. 751.
[26] Ibid., p. 753.
[27] Ibid., pp. 752-53.

4 crores of rupees."[28] It marked the commencement of "the whole system of fraud, violence, oppression by which certain individuals had enriched themselves".[29] Marx did not fail to notice that "between 1769 and 1770, the English manufactured a famine by buying up all the rice and refusing to sell it again, except at fabulous prices."[30] Speaking about the role of the company's officers Marx observed that the whole service "rushed into speculation, skinning ryots" and causing "discontent of the natives".[31]

About the administration of Warren Hastings, Marx observed, it was marked by a further worsening of the agrarian situation. Warren Hastings took care to retain "what for the ryots was a ruinous system of farming the revenues".[32] Under this oppressive system, "the zemindar's credit was impaired, ryots often refused to pay them their rents; hence still more arbitrary persecutions and exactions by the zemindars towards the ryots".[33]

Marx's analysis clearly shows how colonial trade and revenue farming worked hand in hand and how this made India's oppression all the more unbearable.

It is true that long before Marx, the critics of mercantile capitalism severely attacked the system of oppression that the British merchant capitalists had established under the name of the East India Company.

Adam Smith, who anticipated the advance of the era of industrial capitalism, in his classic work, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), directed a virulent attack on the work of the East India Company which he deemed to be destructive both for England and India. He sharply pointed out how the policy pursued by the company was bringing about the ruin of India's productive power.

Stressing particularly the harmful role of the private trade carried on by the company's servants, he observes: "The mono-

[28] Karl Marx, *Notes on Indian History*, Moscow, p. 87.
[29] Ibid., p. 90.
[30] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 753.
[31] Marx, *Notes on Indian History*, p. 88.
[32] Ibid., p. 95.
[33] Ibid., p. 106.

poly of the company's servants tends to stunt the natural growth of every part of the produce in which they choose to deal... and consequently to degrade the cultivation of the whole country, and to reduce the number of its inhabitants".[34]

Referring to the famine of 1769-70 he again pointed out that "some improper regulations, some injudicious restraints imposed by the servants of the East India Company upon the rice trade contributed, perhaps, to turn that dearth into a famine".[35]

In his characteristic style he denounced the entire rule of the East India Company. "Such exclusive companies", he wrote, "are nuisances in every respect; always more or less inconvenient to the countries in which they are established, and destructive to those which have the misfortune to fall under their government"[36]... "No other sovereigns ever were, or, from the nature of things, ever could be, so perfectly indifferent about the happiness or misery of their subjects."[37]

Adam Smith's writings inspired a new school of statesmen represented by Bright, Burke and Sheridan, who denounced with equal severity the misgovernment of the East India Company. Bright forcefully brought out the picture of India ruined by the company's misgovernment. Burke, in his famous speech on the impeachment of Warren Hastings employed all his rhetoric to denounce the tyranny and misgovernment of the company's rule. It would not be out of place here to mention that among the charges, Burke also included Warren Hastings's mismanagement in revenue affairs. (Philip Francis supplied the main materials to Burke and others.) In his forceful style, he gave vivid expression to the innumerable acts of cruelty which Debi Singh perpetrated upon the zamindars and raiyats of Bengal.

James Mill, the historian, was also a severe critic of the company's rule. His famous book, *History of British India,* bristles with denunciatory remarks on the tyranny and misgovernment of the East India Company.

---

[34] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Modern Library, p. 604.
[35] Ibid., p. 493.
[36] Ibid., p. 606.
[37] Ibid., p. 710.

These critics rendered yeoman service by exposing the crimes characteristic of the period of colonialism based on the domination of merchant capital. But much of this criticism was tainted, because the critics, while they concentrated their attack on the destructive policies of the East India Company, scrupulously refrained from attacking the colonial system of exploitation itself.[38] The aim of this criticism was to bring about certain adjustments in the policy of the British colonisers. As a matter of fact, they wanted to put an end to colonialism based on merchant capital, and inaugurate a new era, an era of colonialism based on industrial capitalism.

Marx tore the veil off the face of these critics who paraded as philanthropists. He pointed out that so far as the conquest of India was concerned, there was little to distinguish between the representatives of British merchant capital and those of British industrial capital, for while subjugating India, all the three parties in England, moneyocracy, oligarchy and millocracy, worked hand in hand. He writes: "during all this time all parties in England have connived in silence, even those which had resolved to become the loudest with their hypocritical peace-cant, after the *arrondissement* of the one Indian empire should have been completed. Firstly, of course, they had to get in, in order to subject it afterward to their sharp philanthropy."[39]

Behind the smoke-screen of philanthropy, the British industrial capital wanted to force itself into India, but it met with impediments and chicanery on the part of the Indian government dominated by merchant capital. Marx observes: "Thus India became the battlefield in the contest of the industrial interest on the one side, and of moneyocracy and oligarchy on the other. The manufacturers, conscious of their ascendancy in England, ask now for the annihilation of these antagonistic powers in India, for the destruction of the whole ancient fabric

---

[38] A very helpful discussion on this subject one finds in R. P. Dutt's *India Today* (Indian Edition, 1947), Chapter V—"The British Rule in India—the Old Basis". In another book R. P. Dutt writes: "Cobden and Bright zealously supported the suppression of the Indian Revolt in 1857" (*The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*, PPH Edition, 1953, p. 52).

[39] Marx, *On Colonialism*, Moscow, Second Impression, p. 49.

of Indian government and for the final eclipse of the East India Company."[40]

Marx warned that the poor Hindu world not reap any benefit from this quarrelling of the aristocracy, the moneyocracy and the millocracy about his amelioration.[41]

In regard to the effects which the ascendancy of industrial capital had brought to India, Marx wrote that under the rule of merchant capital India was ruined not only by the tyranny and misgovernment of the company, but also by Manchester and free trade.[42]

Marx pointed out that under the dominance of industrial capital, the methods of exploitation had indeed changed. The aim of industrial capital was to convert India into an economic (raw material) appendage to the industries of Great Britain. With the growing influence of industrial capital the whole character of exploitation changed: "India, the great workshop of cotton manufacture for the world, since immemorial times, became now inundated with English twists and cotton stuffs" causing "the ruin of the native cotton fabrics once so celebrated".[43]

In the period of the ascendancy of industrial capital, the agrarian policies of the East India Company had also undergone a distinct change. During the period of the dominance of merchant capital, the core of the company's agrarian policy was, at one time or other, only a variation of the farming system. Francis, Burke and others condemned this system in the strongest terms only to substitute it by the permanent settlement, which unleashed another, more intensive, form of exploitation of the peasant. Commenting on this change, Marx noted that under the new arrangement there occurred "the confiscation of ryot lands in favour of the zemindars", who acquired absolute power to fleece the ryots. Under the permanent settlement, Marx observes: "the condition of the ryots was not raised; indeed, they were humbled and oppressed still more, and the whole

[40] Ibid., p. 53.
[41] Ibid., p. 43.
[42] Ibid., p. 30.
[43] Ibid., p. 52.

revenue system was thrown out of gear"[44] causing a "whole series of local risings of the ryots against the landlords".[45]

Marx was an indefatigable critic of British colonialism. In fact, history does not know of any other who consistently fought against the system of hideous oppression associated with its name in all its stages of development, be it the period of merchant capital or that of industrial capital. The most noteworthy feature in Marx's writings is that he clearly brought out the connection between the agrarian crisis in India and colonial domination over the country. It is this phenomenon that imparted to that crisis an intensity that was not known before. Marx judged the effects of the British rule in India by the condition of the Indian peasants who constituted the mass of the nation.

The Place of Peasant Risings in History

Subsequent events proved that Marx's prognosis was correct. Really, the raiyats of Bengal were not interested in the substitution of one form of exploitation by another. The farming system was replaced by the permanent settlement, one form of exploitation yielding place to another. The old settlement was distinguished from the new in that in the former the exploitation assumed destructive and rapacious forms, while in the latter it became more refined, more systematic and hence all the more intensive.

As in the period of dominance of merchant capital, so in that of industrial capitalism, the peasant was invariably the worst victim of the colonial oppressors. It is not accidental that in all the struggles against colonialism, whether before or after the permanent settlement, the peasants constituted the main driving force. The resistance of the peasants, however, took varied forms ranging from mass desertion, partaking of the character of passive resistance and rising up to violent revolts. In fact, the peasant uprising in Rangpur (1783) was the precursor of a long series of peasant risings in Bengal. Amongst these the

---

[44] Marx, *Notes on Indian History*, p. 116.
[45] Ibid., p. 120.

Wahabee and Ferazee risings (1830-70)[46], the Santhal rebellion (1855), the indigo revolt (1860), the peasant rising at Pabna (1873) deserve special mention. The peasants directly and indirectly played an important part even in the national revolt of 1857.

Serious weaknesses were, however, inherent in these uprisings, as they corresponded to a backward stage of social development. These uprisings were spontaneous and sporadic. They lacked coordination. They were simply isolated local outbreaks. Lack of organisation, the spontaneous character of the movement and the low level of consciousness of the organisers were features inseparable from these peasant revolts. Nevertheless, these peasant risings delivered the heaviest blow to foreign domination in India.[47] These risings formed the main cur-

---

[46] The Wahabee and Ferazee risings (1830-70) in Bengal, though inspired by the general Wahabee movement led by Sayyid Ahmed of North West Frontier, took on a distinctly local character. Here in Bengal the main targets of their attack were the local zamindars and indigo planters. Even Muslim zamindars were not spared. An officer deputed by the government to investigate the causes of the rising noted that "the Ferazees are much disliked by the Hindoos, by the orthodox Mahomedans and by Europeans" (Proceedings of Judicial Department—Criminal—7 April 1847). The Ferazees declared: "God made the earth common to all men", "the payment of rent is contrary to his law". The Ferazee doctrines, though wrapped up in a religious garb, left a deep impression on the mind of "the lower orders of the people" (Ibid., 29 May 1843).

[47] In this connection one may refer to the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin on the revolutionary significance of the peasant uprisings. Frederick Engels's book, *The Peasant War in Germany*, was written in 1850. The book deals with the history of the peasant war in Germany which broke out in 1525. Marx described the German uprising as "the most radical fact of German history". The Jacquerie in France (1357), the peasant revolt in England (1381), the Hussite movement in Bohemia (1419-37), the peasant war in Germany (1525) took place in a different social, economic and historical setting. These risings prepared the ground for the abolition of feudalism in Europe. Lenin also brought out the revolutionary significance of the peasant uprisings in Russia, e.g. the uprising of Stepan Razin (1667-71), the uprising led by Pugachev (1773-75), because these uprisings were directed against feudalism and serfdom. In India the conditions were different

rent in the anticolonial movement in the country in the late 18th century and well up to the end of the 19th century when the bourgeoisie as a political force had not yet appeared on the scene. Considering the time when they took place, these uprisings, which were of a plebeian character, constituted a most radical chapter of Indian history.

---

and corresponded to a lower stage of social development. As in China (the Taiping rebellion of 1850-65), these uprisings took place in conditions of colonial domination. They were directed against native feudalism which was tied up with colonialism. Hence the radicalism in the peasant revolts in India consisted in their anticolonial, antifeudal content.

Glossary

Abwab	— cesses
Amil	— an intendant or collector of revenue
Amil-namah or amal-namah	— a written order or commission
Amin	— a temporary collector or supervisor, commissioner
Amlah	— agents, officers
Banian	— from bania or merchant, a term used to designate the Indian who manages the concerns of Europeans
Batta	— discount
Baze zamin	— lands exempt from the payment of public revenue or very lightly rated.
Bosneah	— headman of a village
Chakla	— a division of a country
Chakran	— land allotted for the maintenance of public servants
Chobdar	— a staff bearer
Choudhuri	— a receiver of land revenue
Cutchery	— a court of justice, the office of the zamindar
Dar	— keeper or holder (This word is often joined with another, to denote the holder of a particular office or employment as chob-dar, staff holder; zamindar, land-holder. This compound word, with i (ee, y) added to it, denotes the office, as zamindari)
Devatra (Debottar)	— land granted for religious purposes
Dewan	— minister of the revenue department (The term is also used to designate the principal revenue servant under a European collector, and even of a zamindar)

Dewani — the office or jurisdiction of a dewan
Ding — rebellion

Farman (Firman) — an imperial decree, a royal grant
Foujdar — under the Mughal government, a magistrate of the police over a large district and sometimes was employed as receiver-general of the revenues

Gomosthas — a commissioner, factor, agent

Hakim — ruler, master
Hast-o-bud — what is and what was
Huzur — presence

Ijarah — a form of revenue

Juma wasil baki — amount received and balances outstanding
Jumma — the total of land revenue assessment
Jummabandi — a written schedule of the whole of an assessment

Kanungo — a keeper of the records of the pargana or a revenue subdivision
Khalsa — revenue department, applied also to land the revenue of which is paid into the state treasury
Khas — revenue collected immediately by government
Kistbandi — payment by instalments

Mahal — land yielding revenue
Mal — revenue, rent
Malguzar — one who pays rent or revenue
Mandal — the headman of a village
Mathot — an occasional impost, contribution
Mauza — a village
Moshaira — stipend
Mutsuddi — writer, accountant, secretary

Naib — deputy
Naik — a petty military officer
Nazrana (Nazar) — presents
Nizamat — administration of criminal justice

Paik — a person employed as a night-watchman in a village and as a runner or messenger on the business of revenue

Pargana — a small district consisting of several villages
Patta — a lease granted to the cultivator by the government
Patwari — village accountant
Puneah (Punya) — the day on which the settlement of the new year is made

Raiyat — peasant, tenant
Roy Royan — principal officer of the khalsa
Russoom — customary commission

Sanad — a written authority
Sezawal — an Indian officer employed on a monthly allowance for the collection of revenue
Sheristadar — keeper of records
Shroff — a banker or money-changer
Sirkar (Sarkar) — a division of country composed of several parganas; government; paid agent

Tahsildar — an Indian collector of a district acting under a European or a zamindar
Talukdar — a holder of a taluk which is a small portion of land
Tauji — monthly rent account
Thanadar — a petty police officer

Vakil — one endowed with authority to act for another

Zabanbandi — statement on oath

Appendix

The Peasant Uprising of 1783 fired the imagination of many a village bard of Rangpur. But the songs composed by them are mostly lost in oblivion. A few, however, have survived. These were reprinted in *Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika* (1315 B.S.). The song reproduced here was written by Ratiram Das, a Rajbanshi by caste. It eloquently conveys the deep sense of indignation generated then among the zamindars and the raiyats of Rangpur against the oppression of Debi Singh.

রঙ্গপুরের জাগের গান

রঙ্গপুর ফতেপুর প্রকাণ্ড চাকেলা।
রাজা রায় রাজা তায় আছিল একেলা।।
ধর্ম্মে মতি রাজা রায় কত কৈল দান।
ব্রহ্মোত্তর ভূমি কত ব্রাহ্মণেতে পান।।
ব্রহ্মোত্তর দেবোত্তর আর বৈদ্যোত্তর আদি।
কত দান করিয়াছে নাহি যে অবধি।।
মন্থনা বামনডাঙ্গা প্রভৃতি পরগণা।
ফতেপুরের অন্তর্গত সব যায় গণা।।
অনুগত ব্রাহ্মণ জানিয়া কৈল দান।
ফতেপুরের এত বড় এই জন্য মান।।
কোম্পানীর আমলেতে রাজা দেবী সিং।
সে সময়ে মুল্লুকেতে হৈল বার ঢিং॥

যেমন যে দেবতার মূরতি গঠন।
তেমনি হইল তার ভূষণ বাহন।।
রাজার পাপেতে হৈলো মুল্লুক আকাল।
শিয়রে রাখিয়া টাকা গৃহী মারা গেল।।
কত যে খাজানা পাইবে তার নেকা নাই।
যত পারে তত নেয় আরো বলে চাই।।
দেও দেও চাই চাই এই মাত্র বোল।
মাইরের চোটেতে উঠে ক্রন্দনের রোল॥
মানীর সম্মান নাই মানী জমিদার।
ছোট বড় নাই সবে করে হাহাকার।।
সোয়ারি ত চড়িয়া যায় পাইকে মারে জোতা।
দেবী সিংহের কাছে আজ সবে হ'লো ভোঁতা॥
পারে না ঘাঁটায় চলতে ঝিউরী বউরী।
দেবী সিংহের লোকে নেয় তাকে জোর করি॥
পূর্ণ কলি অবতার দেবী সিংহ রাজা।
দেবী সিংহের উপদ্রবে প্রজা ভাজা ভাজা॥
রাজা রায়ের পুত্র হয় শিবচন্দ্র রায়।
শিবের সমান বলি সর্ব্ব লোকে গায়॥
ইটাকুমারিতে তার আছে রাজবাটি।
দেখিতে প্রকাণ্ড বড় অতি পরিপাটী॥
কত ঘর কত দুয়ার কত যে আঙ্গিনা।
তার সনে কোন বাড়ীর তুলনা লাগে না॥
বড় ঘর চণ্ডীমণ্ডপ টুঁই অতি উঁচা।
দুই চালে ঘরখানি কোণা গুলা নীচা॥
পশ্চিম দুয়ারী মণ্ডপ আর কোনখানে নাই।
এ ঘর হাতে যে ঘর হইবে সেটাও দেখবার পাই॥
কত পাইক পেয়াদা আছে কত দারোয়ান।
কত যে আমলা আছে কত দেওয়ান॥

মন্থনার কর্ত্তী জয়দুর্গা চৌধুরাণী।
বড় বুদ্ধি বড় তেজ সকলে বাখানি॥
শিবচন্দ্রের কাজকর্ম্ম তার বুদ্ধি নিয়া।
তার বুদ্ধির পতিষ্ঠা করে সকল দুনিয়া॥
আকালে দুনিয়া গেল দেবী চায় টাকা।
মারি ধরি লুট করে বদমাইস পাকা॥
শিবচন্দ্রের হৃদে এই সব দুস্ক বাজে।
জয়দুর্গার আজ্ঞায় শিবচন্দ্র সাজে॥
দেবী সিংহের দরবারে শিবচন্দ্র গেল।
প্রজার দুস্কের কথা কহিতে লাগিল॥
রজপূত কালাভূত দেবী সিং হয়।
চেহারায় মৈষাসুর হইল পরাজয়॥
শুনি চক্ষু কট্মট্ লাল হৈল রাগে॥
'কৌন হ্যায় কৌন হ্যায়' বলি দেবী হাঁকে॥
শিবচন্দ্রকে কয়েদ করে দিয়া পায়ে বেড়ি।
শিবচন্দ্র রাজা থাকে কয়েকখানাত্ পড়ি॥
দেওয়ান শুনিয়া পরে অনেক টাকা দিয়া।
ইটাকুমারিতে আনে শিবে উদ্ধারিয়া॥
বৈদ্যবংশ চন্দ্র শিবচন্দ্র মহাশয়।
দেবী সিংহের অত্যাচার আর নাহি সয়॥
রঙ্গপুরে আছিল যতেক জমিদার।
সবাকে লিখিল পত্র সেঠ্টে আসিবার॥
নিজ এলাকার আর ভিন্ন এলাকার।
সকল প্রজাক ডাকে রোকা দিয়া তার॥
হাতি ঘোড়া বরকন্দাজে ইটাকুমারী ভরে।
সব জমিদার আইসে শিবচন্দ্রের ঘরে॥
পীরগাছার কর্ত্তী আইল জয়দুর্গা দেবী।
জগমোহনতে বৈসে একে একে সবি॥

রাইয়ৎ প্রজারা সবে থাকে খাড়া হৈয়া।
হাত জুড়ি চক্ষুজলে বক্ষ ভাসাইয়া॥
পেটে নাই অন্ন তাদের পৈরণে নাই বাস।
চামে ঢাকা হাড় কয়খান করি উপবাস॥
শিবচন্দ্র খাড়া হৈয়া কয় হাত জোড়ে।
রাগেতে কহিতে কথা চক্ষে জল পড়ে॥
প্রজাদেক দেখাইয়া জমিদার গণে।
এদের দুস্ক না ভাবিয়া অন্ন খা'ন কেনে॥
উত্তর হাতে জল আসিয়া বড় নাগে বাণ।
সেই বাণে খা'য়া ফেলায় যত কিছু ধান॥
কত দিনে কত কষ্টে কত টাকা দিয়া।
ক্যারোয়ার মুখ আমি দিয়াছি বান্ধিয়া॥
রাজার পাপে প্রজা নষ্ট দেওয়ার নাই জল।
মাঠে ধান জ্বলিয়া গেল ঘরে নাই সম্বল॥
বচ্ছরে বচ্ছরে এলা হইতেছে আকাল।
চালে নাই খেড় কারো ঘরে নাই চাল॥
মাও ছাড়ে বাপ ছাড়ে ছাড়ে নিজের মাইয়া।
বেটা ছাড়ে বেটি ছাড়ে নাই কারো মায়া॥
দুষ্ট রাজা দেবী সিংহে বুঝাইতে গেলাম।
আমার পায়ে বেড়ী দিল দেওয়ানের গোলাম॥
প্রজার অবস্থা দেখি যাক্ করিতে হয়।
কর জমিদারগণ তোমরা মহাশয়॥
কারো মুখে নাই কথা হেটমুণ্ডে রয়।
রাগিয়া শিবচন্দ্র রায় পুঃ রায় কয়॥
যেমন হারামজাদা রজপূত ডাকাইত।
খেদাও সর্ব্বায় তাকে ঘাড়ে দিয়া হাত॥
জ্বলিয়া উঠিল তবে জয়দুর্গা মাই।
তোমরা পুরুষ নও শকতি কি নাই?॥

নাইয়া হয়া জনমিয়া ধরিয়া উহারে।
খণ্ড খণ্ড কাটিবারে পারোঙ্ তলোয়ারে ॥

করিতে হৈবে না আর কাহাকেও কিছু।
প্রজাগুলা করিবে সব হইব না নীচু ॥

রাগি কয় শিবচন্দ্র থর থর কাঁপে।
ফ্যাণা ধরি উঠে যেমন রাগি গোঁমা সাঁপে ॥

শিবচন্দ্র নন্দী কয় শুন প্রজাগণ।
রাজার তোমরাই অন্ন তোমরাই ধন ॥

রঙ্গপুরে যাও সবে হাজার হাজার।
দেবী সিংহের বাড়ী নুট বাড়ী ভাঙ্গ তার ॥

পারিষদবর্গ সহ তারে ধরি আন।
আপন হস্তেতে তার কাটিয়া দিমো কাণ ॥

শিবচন্দ্রের হুকুমেতে সব প্রজা ক্ষ্যাপে।
হাজার হাজার প্রজা ধায় এক ক্ষ্যাপে ॥

নাঠি নিল খন্তি নিল নিল কাচি দাও।
আপত্য করিতে আর না থাকিল কাঁও ॥

ঘাড়েতে বাঁকুয়া নিল হালের জোয়াল।
জাঙ্গলা বলিয়া সব চলিল কাঙ্গাল ॥

চারি ভিতি হাতে আইল রঙ্গপুরে প্রজা।
ভদ্রগুলা আইলা কেবল দেখিবার মজা ॥

ইটা দিয়া পাইট্কা দিয়া পাটকেলায় খুব।
চারি ভিতি হাতে পড়ে করিয়া ঝুপ ঝুপ ॥

ইটায় ঢেলের চোটে ভাঙ্গিল কারো হাড়।
দেবী সিংএর বাড়ী হৈল ইটার পাহাড় ॥

খিড়িকিয়া হুয়ার দিয়া পলাইল দেবী সিং।
সাথে সাথে পালেয়া গেল সেই বারটিং ॥

দেবী সিং পালাইল দিয়া গাও ঢাকা।
কেউ বলে মুর্শিদাবাদ কেউ বলে ঢাকা ॥

ইংরাজের হাতে রাজ্য দিলেন চক্রপাণি।
সুবিচার করি গেল আপনি কোম্পানি ॥
ইংরাজ বিচার করে এজলাশ করি।
একে একে ফাটকেতে রাখে টিংএ ধরি ॥
সেই শিবচন্দ্র রাজা ইটাকুমারীর।
সেই গ্রামে বাস করি জানিবেন থির ॥

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

In Rangpur, Fatehpur was a big "chakla" (revenue district) and king Rajarai lived there all alone. A deeply religious man, Rajarai was given to charities and many Brahmins were gifted land. The plots of land that he gave away to Brahmins and physicians, or consecrated to gods, cannot be measured. One can name Manthana, Bamandanga and others in the Fatehpur division. Fatehpur's stock is high, because the gifts were bestowed on loyal Brahmins.

During the time of the East India Company, Debi Singh was the "Raja"; he had a dozen associates. As one looks, so one dresses or deports oneself. Because of the sins of the king, the country faced famine. People died, leaving money under their pillows. The amount of taxes to be taken from subjects was never determined; from the people they exacted as much as they could—but still wanted more. All they did was to demand more and more, and due to inhuman torture there rose a wail of agony. Even the honourable zamindar was denied his honour; people of all classes cried in despair. Passengers on palanquins were assaulted by the "paiks"—and everything was rendered futile by Debi Singh's oppression. Women could not move about their backyards; they were forcibly taken away by Debi Singh's men. Raja Debi Singh himself became the incarnation of "Koli". The subjects were utterly sick of his misrule.

Sivchandra Roy was Rajarai's son; everbody praised him as equal to Siva. He had a palace at Itakumari, massive and neatly laid, which had numerous rooms, doors and yards. No other building could stand comparison to it; the lounge with the altar of the goddess Chandi had a high ceiling; the twin-roofed room had low eaves. One never found a west-facing lounge elsewhere—one adjoining room could be seen from the other.

There were paiks, bailiffs, guards, clerks and ministers without number. Joydurga Choudhurani, the ruling lady of Manthana, was

praised by all for her sagacity and forceful personality. All that Sivchandra did was on her counsel—and the whole world was firmly convinced of her wisdom.

When the country was perishing of famine, Debi Singh, the arch villain, was busy plundering the people. Their misery touched the heart of Sivchandra, who, at the command of Joydurga, made a move. He went down to the court of Debi Singh and narrated the story of the people's suffering. Debi Singh, the Rajput, was as black as a ghost in appearance, could put "Mahishasur" in the shade. On hearing this, his angry eyes turned red; "Who is here, who is here" shouted he. Sivchandra was put behind the bars, his feet in iron-fetters. Later, when his dewan learned all this, he had Sivchandra freed and brought to Itakumari—on paying a lot of money. Sivchandra was the pride of the Baidya family; he could not bear Debi Singh's oppression any longer. He wrote letters to all zamindars in Rangpur asking them to come over, he sent out an open letter to all the people of his area as well as to those outside it.

With all the zamindars arriving at Sivchandra's palace, Itakumari was filled with elephants, horses and soldiers. Also arrived the ruler of Pirgachha, Joydurga Devi. One by one, they were all seated in the Conference Hall adjoining the temple. The raiyats kept standing, hands folded and tears rolling down their chests. They had neither food to eat nor clothes to wear; through starvation they were reduced to bones, covered only by a skin.

Sivchandra stood up with folded hands to speak; as he spoke he wept in anger. Pointing out the subjects to the zamindars, he said: "How could you eat without a thought for the sufferings of these people? Too often there were floods when the waters came down from the north, in which all the paddy was destroyed. I spent a good deal of time, labour and money to have the mouth of Caroah dyked. The subjects perish for the sins of the king. There is no water for irrigation; the paddy in the field is scorched down, and there is nothing left at home. Every year, we have a famine. There is no straw on the roof, no rice in the stores. The mother goes away, the father disappears, so does the wife—and without caring for anybody go away the son and the daughter. I went down to reason with the vicious Raja Debi Singh, but his slaves put fetters on my feet. Look at the condition of the subjects, dear zamindars, and do whatever you deem proper."

Nobody uttered a word; all heads were bowed low. Sivchandra Roy lost his temper and spoke again: "Since the Rajput robber is a scoundrel, you should all drive him out."

At this stage Mother Joydurga flared up: "Are you not men—aren't you strong? Though I am born a woman, I can seize him and cut him to pieces with a sword. Nobody would be required to do anything, everything will be done by the subjects. But we shall never bow down."

Sivchandra spoke, trembling with anger, like a charging hooded king-cobra. Sivchandra Nandy said: "Listen, my subjects. You provide the king's food, his riches. Go out to Rangpur in your thousands, plunder Debi Singh's palace and pull it down. Get him, bring him here along with his henchmen, and I will, with my own hands, cut his ears off."

At Sivchandra's command all the people took heart and rushed together in their thousands. They took sticks, spears, sickles, choppers; nobody remained to look after the children. On their shoulders, they carried a balance of load and the yoke. They were made beggars—so they ran like savages.

From all directions the people converged on Rangpur. The gentle folk came—only to watch the fun. The men threw brickbats and stones, which kept falling with thud from all directions. In the fusillade of stones, some suffered broken bones and Debi Singh's palace was reduced to a heap of bricks. He escaped through the backdoor; with him fled those twelve associates. Debi Singh got away with a wrapper on his body. Some say he went to Murshidabad, some say he fled to Dacca.

The Lord entrusted the English with the kingdom—and justice was done by the East India Company. The Englishmen held a court and a trial; one by one Debi Singh's associates were put in prison. Let it be known well that I live in the same village of Itakumari where Sivchandra was the king.*

---

* Translated from the Bengali original by Prof Amiya Bose of City College, Calcutta.

Bibliography

A. UNPUBLISHED RECORDS

SUPREME AUTHORITIES

Proceedings of the Comptrolling Committee of Revenue, 1771-1772.

Proceedings of the Committee of Circuit, 1772-1773.

Proceedings of the Revenue Board Consisting of the Whole Council, 1772-1774.

Proceedings of the Revenue Department, 1775-1786.

INTERMEDIATE AUTHORITIES

Proceedings of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, 1773-1781.

Proceedings of the Committee of Revenue, 1781-1786.

Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, 1786-1788.

B. PUBLISHED RECORDS

A Letter Copy Book of the Resident at the Durbar at Murshidabad (1769-1770), edited with Introduction and Notes by W. K. Firminger (1919), Vols I-II.

Proceedings of the Controlling Council of Revenue (1770-1772), Vols I-XII.

Bengal District Records, edited by W. K. Firminger, Rangpur: Vols I-VI; Dinajpur: Vols I-II.

Maharaja Deby Sinha, published by the Nashipur Raj Estate (1914): —a selection from the proceedings of the Supreme Council relating to Debi Singh and the Rangpur uprising of 1783.

C. SECONDARY WORKS

Ascoli. F.D.—*Early Revenue History of Bengal and the Fifth Report (1917).*

Baden-Powell, B.H.—*The Land Systems of British India*, Vol. I (London, 1892).

Buchanan Hamilton—*Account of Runggopoor,* in Martin's *Eastern India,* Vol. III (1838).

Colebrook and Lambert—*Remarks on the Present State of Husbandry and Commerce of Bengal.*

Dutt, Romesh—*The Economic History of India under Early British Rule* (Seventh Edition, 1950).

Dutt, R. Palme—*India Today* (Indian Edition, 1947).

Dutt, R. Palme—*The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire* (Indian Edition, 1953).

Engels, F.—*The Peasant War in Germany* (Moscow, 1956).

Field, C.D.—*Landholding and Relation of Landlord and Tenant in Various Countries* (Second Edition, 1885).

Firminger, W.K.—*Historical Introduction to the Bengal Portion of the Fifth Report* (reprint published by Indian Studies: Past and Present, 1962).

Glazier, E.G.—*A Report on the District of Rungpore* (1873).

Guha, Ranajit—*A Rule of Property for Bengal—An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (1963).

Harrington—*Analysis of Bengal Regulations (1821)*—reprint of a portion of the above relating to revenue system, Government Press, 1866.

Hilton, R.H. and H. Fagan—*The English Rising of 1381* (London, 1950).

Hunter, W.W.—*Bengal Manuscript Records (1782-1807)*, 4 Vols. (1894).

Long—*Selections from Unpublished Records of Government of Bengal (1748-67).*

Macek, Josef—*The Hussite Movement in Bohemia* (Prague, 1965).

Marx, K.—*Capital*, Vol. I (Moscow, 1954).

Marx, K. and F. Engels—*On Colonialism* (Moscow).

Marx, K.—*Notes on Indian History* (Moscow).

Marx, K. and F. Engels—*The First Indian War of Independence* (Moscow).

Mill, James—*The History of British India* (fourth edition, with notes and continuation, by H.H. Wilson), Vols I-X.

Ramsbotham, R.B.—*Studies in the Land Revenue History of Bengal* (1926).

Sinha, Narendra Krishna—*The Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. II (1962).

Smith, Adam—*The Wealth of Nations* (Modern Library, New York).

Verelst, H.—*A View of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the English Government in Bengal* (London, 1772).

District Gazetteers—Rangpur, Dinajpur.

Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika (1313-1315 B.S.)

o

NARAHARI KAVIRAJ, born in February 1917, is wellknown as a Marxist intellectual in Bengal.

He is the head of the department of history, Muralidhar Girls' College, Calcutta.

He is the author of several books. His book *Swadhinatar Sangrame Bangla* (Freedom Movement in Bengal) is generally recognised as a contribution to the history of the Indian national liberation movement.

In 1942 he joined the CPI and is now the secretary of the Lenin School for Marxist Studies, Calcutta.

He is at present joint editor of *Mulyayan,* a reputed Marxist theoretical journal in Bengali.